

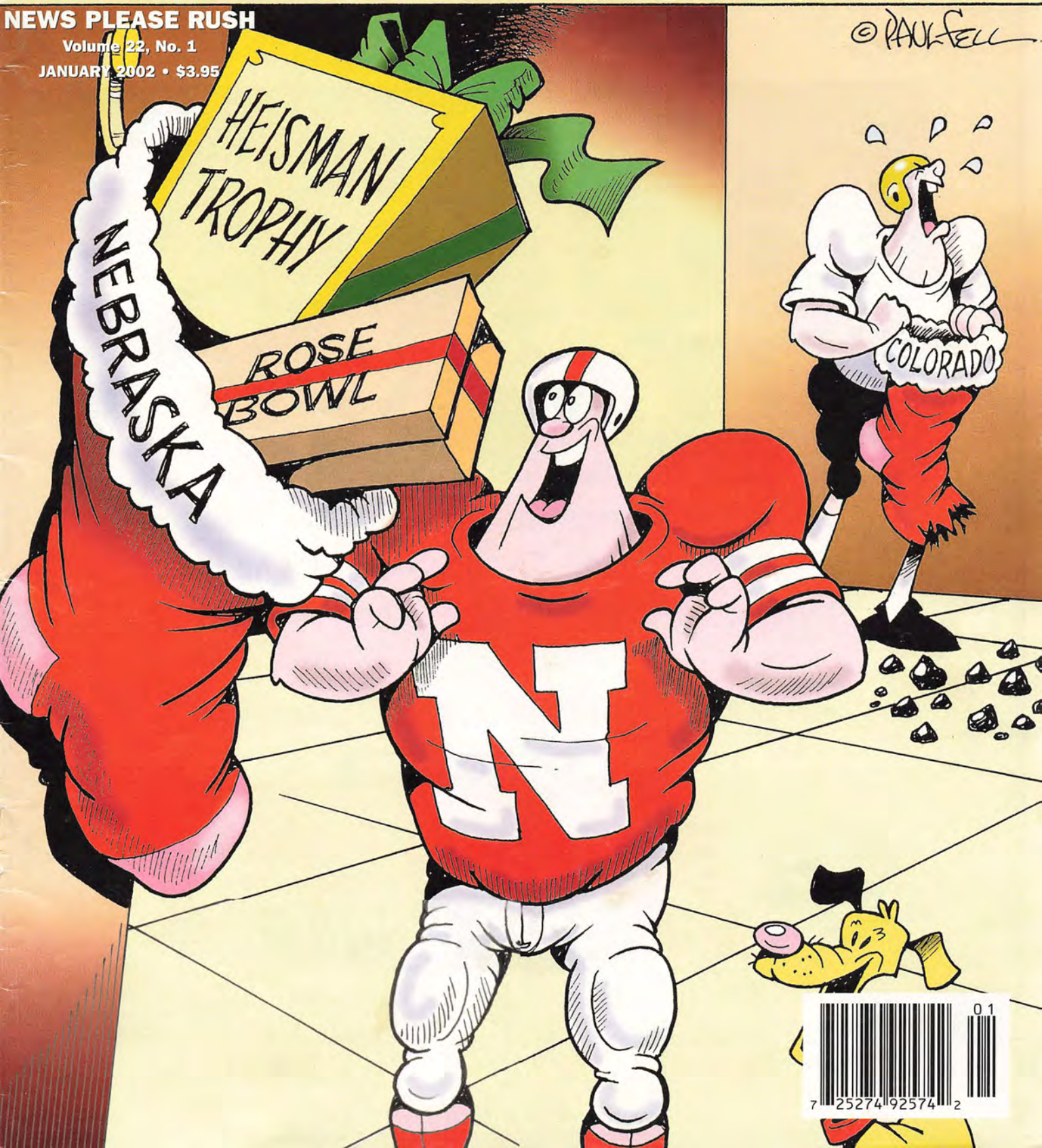
Huskers Illustrated

NEWS PLEASE RUSH

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champion (chăm'pē-on)

n. 1. A winner of first place in a competition. 2. One who shows marked superiority.



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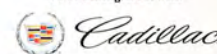


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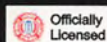
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Winding Road Leads to Pasadena

Strange twists give Huskers, Hurricanes chance to renew postseason rivalry



Brian Hill

IN MID-NOVEMBER, it certainly looked like old bowl rivals Nebraska and Miami were on a collision course to meet early in the new year in Pasadena.

But it ended up taking one of the more bizarre stretches of college football ever to bring the two powers together for the first time in seven years.

You know most of the story. Nebraska goes to Colorado and gets trampled by the Buffaloes the day after Thanksgiving, knocking the Huskers out of the championship picture, according to the "experts."

The next day, 3-7 Oklahoma State knocked off Oklahoma, and the dominoes began to fall.

You can read more about the strange sequence of events that brought Nebraska back to the top in this edition of *Huskers Illustrated*.

Yes, I'll admit that our neighbors to the west were playing as well as anyone in the country at the end of the season. But you don't play for a national championship with two losses. That's not my rule or Nebraska's rule. It's the (BCS) system, and please don't take out the middle letter when you refer to it.

It's the system that brings the Huskers and Hurricanes together for another chapter in this postseason rivalry that has produced great moments for both schools.

On Dec. 15, 1962, Nebraska and Miami met before 6,166 fans who braved freezing weather in New York City for the second and last Gotham Bowl. The Huskers completed Bob Devaney's first season by upsetting Miami and George

Mira 36-34 to win their first bowl game in three tries.

Nebraska won two regular-season meetings in the mid-1970s, but things didn't really get interesting until the classic Orange Bowl meeting that capped the 1983 season.

In one of the most exciting bowl games ever played, top-ranked Nebraska rallied from deficits of 17-0 and 31-17. The Huskers cut the margin to 31-30 with 48 seconds remaining, and Coach Tom Osborne chose to go for a two-point conversion and the win. Turner Gill's pass was knocked away from Jeff Smith, and Miami had its first national championship.

The Hurricanes also defeated the Huskers in the 1989 and 1992 Orange Bowls, the latter giving Miami a share of its fourth national title in nine years.

Nebraska finally got a measure of revenge, when Cory Schlesinger's two fourth-quarter touchdowns lifted the Huskers to a 24-17 victory and gave Osborne his first national title Jan. 1, 1995.

Seven years and two days later, Nebraska and Miami will meet for the 10th time, on a truly neutral field in California. The winner is assured of at least a split of the title, as the coaches' poll trophy automatically goes to the winner of the BCS championship game.

The Huskers are headed to the Rose Bowl for the first time in 61 years. The Jan. 1, 1941, meeting with Stanford was Nebraska's first bowl game. Contributing editor Mike Babcock takes a look back at that game as part of our Rose Bowl preview. We've also got plenty on the 2002 version.

And, oh by the way, you can read about the guy getting crunched on the cover of last issue (inset), who just happened to win the Heisman Trophy Dec. 8 in New York.

Those same "experts" we mentioned earlier were writing that the loss to Colorado ended his chances. ■



ON THE COVER

Despite finishing the regular season with a loss at Colorado, Eric Crouch won the Heisman Trophy, and the Huskers are headed to the Rose Bowl. Cover art by Paul Fell

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Huskers Illustrated

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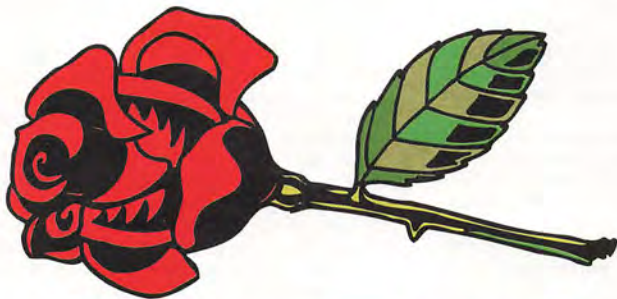
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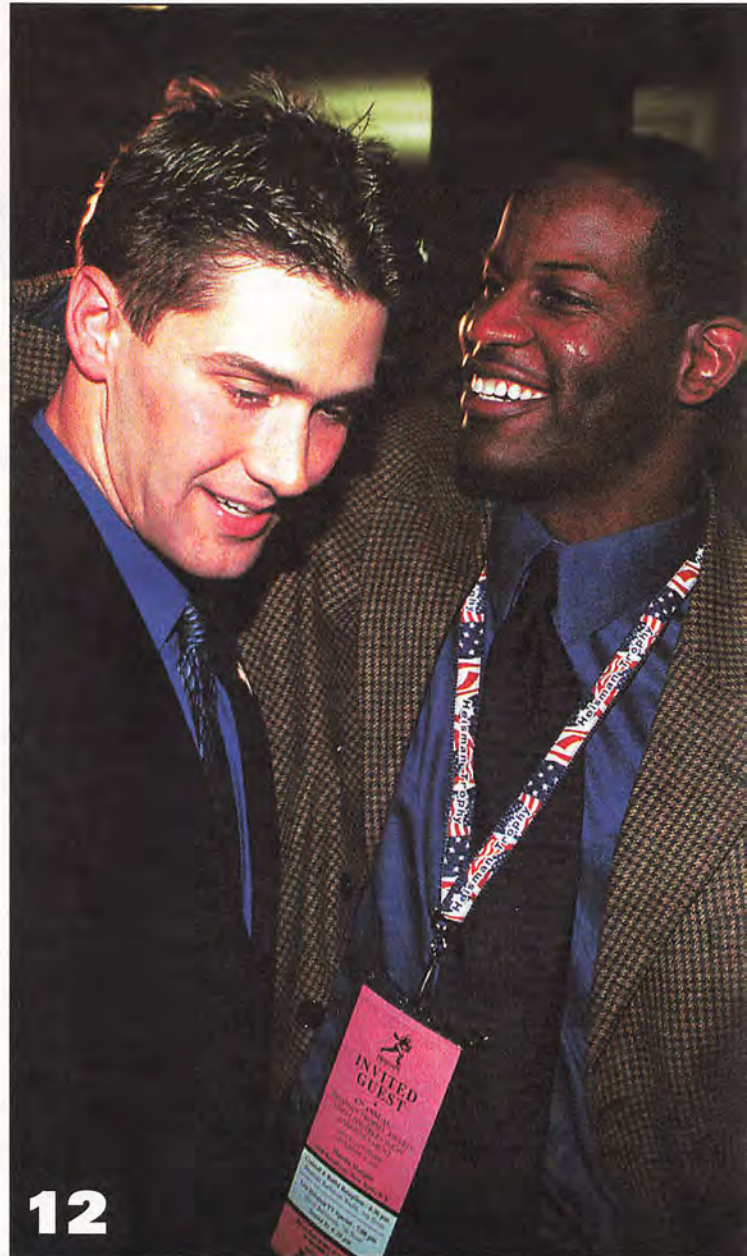
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12 The No. 1 Option

Being named the winner of the Heisman Trophy was a humbling experience for Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch. *By Mike Babcock*

NEXT ISSUE

The bowl review edition (February) will be mailed Jan. 15.

Baseball Team Reloads

The Nebraska baseball team's success during the past three seasons — particularly a year ago — and the opening of its new home at Haymarket Park have enhanced recruiting.

"We went head-to-head with some big programs for many of these players," Coach Dave Van Horn said in announcing 11 recruits for 2002-03 in late November.

The class, which Van Horn described as "probably the most athletic" during his four-year tenure at Nebraska, includes six high school players and five junior college transfers.

"This class covers a lot of areas for us," said Van Horn. It includes four pitchers and players capable of playing every position except catcher — where the Cornhuskers are well-stocked.

Because of the quality of the players who signed letters of intent in November, there's a chance some could turn professional before enrolling at Nebraska. As many as six or seven of the recruits could be drafted in June, according to Van Horn, and "we may lose a couple in the draft," he said.

The Cornhuskers are coming off the most successful season in school history, finishing with a 50-16 record and making their first appearance in the College World Series. They won the Big 12 regular-season title and a third consecutive conference tournament championship and were ranked in the top 10 in the nation in all three major polls. They are scheduled to open the 2002 season on Feb. 15.

Fall letter-of-intent signees:

Kevin Belcher, OF, R/R, 6-2, 185, Lake Forest, Ill.: Belcher is the fastest member of Nebraska's recruiting class, having been timed at 6.65 seconds in the 60-yard dash. He earned All-Illinois honorable mention and was selected as one of the top 15 high school players in the state by Baseball America/Prospects Plus.

He batted close to .400 during his junior season and picked the Cornhuskers over Miami (Fla.) and Auburn.

Jesse Boyer, OF, L/L, 6-1, 185, Littleton, Colo. (Neosho Co. CC): Boyer batted .395 with 14 home runs and 39 runs-batted-in as a junior college freshman — in 45 games. He also hit 10 doubles and scored 40 runs, with a .503 on-base percentage.

He picked Nebraska over Florida, Oklahoma State, Arkansas and Louisiana Tech.

Brandon Fusilier, OF, R/R, 6-2, 215, Coppell, Texas (Navarro CC): Fusilier hit .382 with 11 home runs and 55 runs-batted-in as a junior college freshman. He also



Alex Gordon is regarded as one of the top high school position players ever from Lincoln.

stole 19 bases and scored 37 runs and was selected to play in the Texas Junior College All-Star game. He played with several current Cornhuskers for the Liberal, Kan., Bee Jays during the summer, hitting .329 with 29 RBI, four home runs and three triples.

Oklahoma State, Texas Tech and Texas-Arlington were among the schools that recruited him.

Alex Gordon, INF, L/R, 6-0, 185, Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast High School): Gordon is regarded as one of the top high school position players ever to come from Lincoln and is rated as the best prospect in the state by Baseball America/Prospects Plus and Team One Baseball. He is a three-year starter at Southeast High and a two-time All-Nebraska selection.

As a junior, he led the state in hitting (.597), doubles (17) and home runs (10) — batting leadoff. He also was among the state leaders in base hits (46), runs scored (39) and runs-batted-in (30).

Gordon, a three-sport athlete, was the Omaha World-Herald state high school boys' athlete of the year, the first junior to receive that award from the World-Herald in 51 years.

A third baseman — who also has pitched on occasion — he picked Nebraska over Tennessee and Baylor and "has an opportunity to come in a start for us as a freshman," said Van Horn.

That's assuming he doesn't sign a professional contract as an early-round draft pick.

Joe Gullion, INF, R/R, 6-1, 185, Overland Park, Kan. (Johnson Co. CC): Gullion was named the East Jayhawk Conference freshman of the year, hitting .484 with 20 home runs, 75 runs-batted-in, 71 runs scored and a 1.045 slugging percentage. He also hit 15 doubles and six triples, with 19 multiple-RBI games as a leadoff hitter.

He was a 43rd round pick of the Montreal Expos in the 2001 major league draft.

Gullion, a shortstop in junior college, could play second or third base at Nebraska.

Oklahoma State, Mississippi, Kansas and Kansas State also recruited him.

Blair Johnson, RHP, R/R, 6-3, 200, Topeka, Kan. (Washburn Rural HS): Johnson is ranked among the nation's top 50 high school seniors by Baseball America/Prospects Plus (No. 31) and Team

One Baseball (No. 43). He had a 5-3 record with an earned-run average of less than 2.50 as a junior, to earn all-state honors in Kansas' large-schools classification.

He struck out 70, including 13 in the state quarterfinals. "Blair was one of the best pitching prospects in the country," Van Horn said. His fastball is consistently in the upper 80s and lower 90s.

He picked the Huskers over Wichita State.

Kila Kaaihue, 1B, L/R, 6-3, 200, Kailua, Hawaii (Iolani HS): Kaaihue is a two-time all-state selection at the school from which the Cornhuskers recruited All-America pitcher Shane Komine. Kaaihue hit .492 with five home runs and 20 runs-batted-in in 85 at-bats as a junior. His father, and coach, played in the Pittsburgh and St. Louis minor league organizations.

Kaaihue picked Nebraska over Stanford, Hawaii and Brigham Young.

Zach Kroenke, LHP, L/L, 6-1, 180, Omaha, Neb. (Northwest HS): Kroenke is ranked among the top 175 players nationally as well as the No. 2 prospect in Nebraska by Team One Baseball. In American Legion baseball over the summer, he was 6-1 with an earned-run average of just over 3.00. He struck out 70 in 70 innings, with a fastball consistently in the mid-80s.

Kroenke also had scholarship offers from Kansas and Winthrop and attracted recruiting interest from Clemson, Minnesota and Northern Iowa.

Francisco Leando, OF, L/L, 6-0, 170, Caracas, Venezuela (Western Neb. CC): Leando hit .405 with 21 home runs and 73 runs-batted-in at Dodge City Community College as a freshman, then transferred to Western Nebraska Community College when his coach at Dodge City, Mike Jones, made the move to start a baseball program at WNCC.

Leando, who stole 21 bases, could hit third at Nebraska, according to Van Horn.

Leando picked Nebraska over Kansas State, Florida Atlantic and Florida International.

Rob Morrissey, RHP, R/R, 6-0, 175, Omaha, Neb. (Millard West HS): Morrissey compiled an 8-1 record with a 2.33 earned-run average and 50 strikeouts in 45 innings as a junior on a Millard West team that won a state-record 33 games. He also played shortstop and hit .463. During the summer American Legion season, he was 8-2 with a 2.60 earned-run average.

Baseball America/Prospects Plus rates him as the No. 5 prospect in Nebraska.

Quinton Robertson, RHP, R/R, 6-5, 200, Richland, Miss. (Texarkana College): Robertson was a 17th-round selection of the New York Yankees in the 2001 major league draft after a freshman season at Texarkana College in which he was 9-0 with a 3.45 earned-run average. He pitched 73 innings, averaging nine strikeouts per game. Opponents hit .255 against him.

He was a second-team NJCAA All-American. Mississippi State, Mississippi, Southern Mississippi and Texas were among the schools he considered. Despite the potential for his signing a professional contract, "we are hoping we can get him to Nebraska," Van Horn said. ■

QUARTERBACK AGAIN

Mike Stuntz got the word from Coach Frank Solich before the team resumed practicing in early December. The two met in the hallway outside the locker room.

"We're going to have you work at quarterback," Solich told him.

"Naturally, I was a little excited," Stuntz said later that week.

The freshman from Council Bluffs, Iowa, was more than a little excited. But he has shown a tendency to understate his feelings during his first season at Nebraska. After throwing a "flash reverse" touchdown pass to Eric Crouch in the Oklahoma game, he remained relatively low-key.

He has the composure and presence of a quarterback, the position for which he was recruited. But he agreed to play wide receiver this season, in order to get on the field and help the team.

When he made the switch he was told he would be allowed to return to quarterback in the spring. So there was never any doubt he would. The coaches "told me up-front they were going to bring me back," he said. "Our coaches are real straight shooters. I believed them the whole time."

And true to their word, he's been at quarterback during bowl preparations. If he gets in the bowl game, however, it will still be at wide receiver, according to Solich.

Stuntz was "rusty" his first few practices at quarterback. But he played the position his final two seasons in high school, and it's "kind of like riding a bike," he said. "You never really forget. But you can't pull all the tricks that you used to pull right away. You kind of have to get into it a little bit."

Even though he spent the season at wide receiver, the experience will translate to playing quarterback, he said. How far along is he? "It's kind of hard to put a number on it. Obviously, I still have some work to do, but I feel like I've come quite a ways from when I got here in August."

"I don't know . . . 50 percent or 60 percent or whatever. I feel like I've learned more than I will learn. I feel like I'm past the halfway part of what I have to know. How far past I couldn't tell you."

Stuntz hasn't caught a pass this season, and he didn't get in every game. "But I think I've managed to progress pretty well, fairly steadily," he said. "In real world time, it hasn't been that long."

"But in football-season time, it seems like it's been about forever." ■



Mike Stuntz

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

ALL-AMERICANS ALL

Four Cornhuskers were included on the Football News All-America team. Cornerback Keyuo Craver and offensive guard Toniui Fonoti were first-team selections. Rush end Chris Kelsay was chosen to the second team. And quarterback Eric Crouch was on the third team.

IT'S ACADEMIC

Sophomore fullback Judd Davies, senior tight end Tracey Wistrom, senior offensive tackle Dave Volk and junior rush end Chris Kelsay were included on the Academic All-District VII team. They also were among 19 Cornhuskers on the Academic All-Big 12 first team.

The others were Mic Boettner, Joe Chrisman, Sandro DeAngelis, Gabe Fries, Nick Gragert, Troy Hassebroek, Jeff Hemje, Trevor Johnson, Phil Peetz, Pat Ricketts, Kyle Ringenberg, Carl Scholting, Jeremy Slechta, Aaron Terpening and Wes Woodward.

Inclusion on the first team requires a minimum 3.20 cumulative grade-point average.

Eleven Cornhuskers earned second-team honors (minimum 3.0 to 3.19 grade-point average): Demoiné Adams, Jamie Burrow, Keyuo Craver, Tim Demerath, John Klem, Steve Kriewald, Kyle Larson, Casey Nelson, Justin Smith, Wilson Thomas and J.P. Wichmann.

IF YOU CAN'T SAY SOMETHING NICE

During the Big 12 championship game, ABC announcer Gary Danielson raised the ire of Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne with disparaging comments directed at the Cornhuskers.

Byrne said he was disappointed that Danielson had "singled us out and said it would be a travesty if Nebraska ended up in the Rose Bowl. I mean, we're 11-1. We've been the No. 1 team in the country most of the year. As I understand the process, it's supposed to be about the entire year."

Byrne added that he wouldn't have been as upset if Danielson hadn't repeated the remark.

He also was disappointed to hear Mike Lupica make similar comments the next day on the "Sports Reporters," a program on the ESPN cable television network. "They seemed to be singling out Nebraska on the basis of one football game," said Byrne. "You need to remember it's (based on) the entire process, the entire year."

ETHICS NOT ABSOLUTE

Prior to LSU's upset of Tennessee in the Southeastern Conference championship game, ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit predicted in a column for ESPN.com that enough coaches who vote in the ESPN/USA Today poll would change their votes to move Colorado ahead of Nebraska, even though they had voted the Buffaloes behind Nebraska in the previous week's poll.

"There's a lot of integrity in the fraternity of coaches," Herbstreit wrote.

So Kirk, is changing one's vote based on nothing more than a desire to subvert the system in which you agreed to participate in good conscience evidence of integrity?

The votes of those in the coaches' poll are anonymous, by the way, while those who vote in the Associated Press media poll reveal their ballots. Which poll has more integrity?

Presumably, Herbstreit didn't major in ethics at Ohio State.

WISH COMES TRUE

Prior to the season, junior rush end Chris Kelsay told his dad he hoped the Cornhuskers would end up playing Miami for a national title. The morning of the day Bowl Championship Series officials announced that Nebraska would be going to Pasadena, Kelsay's dad reminded him of his wish.

"I had totally forgotten about that," said Kelsay. "It is kind of weird how everything worked out."

ALWAYS PREPARING

Coach Frank Solich left practice early the day of the Heisman Trophy presentation to fly to New York City to attend the ceremony at the Marriott Marquis. He was joined on the two-hour charter flight by Athletic Director Bill Byrne and quarterbacks coach Turner Gill.

After the ceremony, Solich watched the end of LSU's upset of Tennessee in the SEC championship on television at an airport in Teterboro, N.J., before returning to Lincoln. On the late-night return trip, Solich studied tape of Miami on a handheld video player. ■

Definitely Fortunate

The Cornhuskers didn't create the system and shouldn't have to justify themselves



Mike BABCOCK

AS IT TURNED OUT, Jamie Burrow was in the minority. As soon as Louisiana State defeated Tennessee in the Southeastern Conference championship game, he was convinced Nebraska was headed to the Rose Bowl game to play Miami for the BCS version of the national title.

The senior middle linebacker wasn't plagued by the doubt that caused teammates to spend a sleepless night and agonize the next morning until the bowl pairings were announced.

It was clear-cut. Tennessee was out. And Nebraska was in. "I was probably a little bit more naïve about the whole situation, thinking that there was no way we could be denied," said Burrow. "Fortunately for me, it all worked out."

Fortunately is the operative word. In the aftermath of a 62-36 loss at Colorado in the final game of the regular season, the Cornhuskers are definitely fortunate to be playing in the Rose Bowl.

But their unexpected good fortune has produced considerable controversy and left Burrow more than a little disappointed. "Just to have people write us off like that was kind of upsetting, having people petitioning against us getting to the national championship (game)," he said.

"We felt like people disrespected us a little. We have a chance to get all that respect back in this game. So look for us to be real focused and full of concentration for this game. There aren't very many times in life where if you mess up, you're going to have a second chance."

Ironically, Nebraska has been victimized by the system providing that chance. The Cornhuskers didn't create the system from which they have benefited. And they shouldn't have to justify themselves to every columnist and sports-talk host who suddenly has a gripe with the BCS rankings.

The BCS rules were established before the first game was played this season. And yet because the results weren't acceptable at the end, some coaches who vote in the ESPN/USA Today poll — a component of the BCS rankings — took it upon themselves to try to subvert the system.

They managed to cut the difference between Colorado's and Nebraska's BCS rankings to .05, probably doing more harm than good in the process. In this case, closer isn't better.

That attempt calls into question not only the ethics of some of the 60 coaches with votes but also the efficacy of continuing to use their poll in determining future BCS rankings.

Curiously enough, the Rose Bowl winner will receive the Sears Trophy, emblematic of the coaches' national title. Because of the controversy, if Nebraska defeats Miami, the

Associated Press national champion could very well be the Fiesta Bowl winner, either Oregon or Colorado.

Oregon and Colorado were ranked ahead of Nebraska in both the AP and coaches' polls — though Colorado wouldn't have been in the latter if not for the coaches' last-ditch effort.

If the national championship were still determined only by the polls, Oregon would be playing Miami in the Rose Bowl because the Pac-10 champion Ducks were No. 2.

The irony there is, if not for the exclusive pact between the Rose Bowl and the Pac-10 and Big Ten conferences, the BCS might never have been created. The polls could have identified a national title bowl match-up if the champions of those two conferences weren't locked into the Rose Bowl.

Nebraska and Michigan could have played for the national title in 1997, if not for the Big Ten's Rose Bowl pact, just as Nebraska and Penn State could have played for the title in 1994.

The BCS changed that, although the Big Ten and Pac-10 have still locked up the Rose Bowl in years when neither conference champion can play for the national title — and the Rose Bowl doesn't play host to the BCS national title game, in rotation with the Orange, Fiesta and Sugar Bowls.

In a roundabout way, Oregon's complaint is with its own conference for contributing to the need for a system other than the polls, which determined the national title contenders until four years ago.

Oregon Coach Mike Bellotti compared the results of the BCS rankings to contracting cancer, an insensitive metaphor that illustrates how mean-spirited the controversy has become.

Even so, Oregon could make a good case for playing Miami, as could Colorado, which followed its 26-point victory against Nebraska with an upset of Texas in the Big 12 championship game.

The problem in both cases was the eight computers that contribute to BCS point totals took into account the entire season rather than just one or two games at the end.

Presumably Oregon and Colorado were aware of the parameters of the system. But even if they weren't, their complaint should be with the computers, not with Nebraska.

The Cornhuskers didn't devise the computer programs, and they didn't plug in the data.

Burrow does "have some friends in high school that are pretty good hackers," though, and "maybe they saw it was going to be pretty close for us and helped me out a little," he said. "I don't know where those guys are now. I heard a couple of them went to the University of Iowa."

"But thanks, if those guys had anything to do with it."

They didn't, of course. That's just the way the system worked. ■



Jamie Burrow says the Huskers have a chance to regain some respect.

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Memorable Weekend

*Everything falls into place
for fortunate Huskers*



Terry DOUGLASS

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to imagine a more memorable weekend in Nebraska football history, especially considering the Cornhuskers didn't even play a game.

The Heisman Trophy and a spot in the Bowl Championship Series national title game — both apparently out of Nebraska's reach following a 62-36 loss at Colorado on Nov. 23 — were secured in a span of less than 20 hours. Quarterback Eric Crouch became NU's third Heisman winner on Dec. 8, and the next day, the news got even better as NU (11-1) ended up No. 2 in the final BCS standings and received a bid to play 11-0 Miami (Fla.) in the Rose Bowl Jan. 3 at Pasadena, Calif.

Nebraska coach Frank Solich realizes that his team couldn't have got to the Rose Bowl without a lot of help.

"It's been a strange season the last two weeks in terms of how things have played out," Solich said. "I think that's really an example of what football's all about in this day and age and the parity of college football."

Since Nebraska's shockingly lopsided loss at Colorado, every domino that needed to fall for the improbable title game scenario has toppled. One day after Nebraska lost, Oklahoma also dropped out of the hunt with an upset loss at home to Oklahoma State. The combination of the Sooners' setback and Ohio State's win over Michigan improved Nebraska's situation after that weekend, and a bid to one of the four BCS bowl games became likely.

Almost in jest, BCS analysts noted that Nebraska still had a slim shot at making it to the title game heading into the next-to-last week of the season, even though its regular season was complete. Although No. 1 Miami survived with a two-point win at Virginia Tech, the Huskers enjoyed another fortunate idle date on Dec. 1, as Tennessee knocked off Florida and Colorado clipped Texas in the Big 12 Championship game.

When the smoke cleared, every Big Red fan temporarily made purple their favorite color for the final weekend of the regular season. Nebraska needed LSU to upset Tennessee in the Southeastern Conference Championship game to have a chance to climb one spot to No. 2 in the final BCS standings.

Again, things went the Huskers' way, as LSU rallied to beat the Volunteers 31-20, making Nebraska the odds-on favorite to back into the Rose Bowl. The SEC title game concluded a truly remarkable series of events.

"It was just one thing after another that has transpired within the last couple of weeks to make it a very interesting season," Solich said. "We've had to look at it from the standpoint that a lot of things had to go our way in order to get into this game," Solich said. "A lot of those things were somewhat unforeseen, but they all fell into place."

Senior tackle Dave Volk agreed, saying he didn't truly believe the Huskers would be playing in the Rose Bowl

until he saw the announcement on TV.

"The last couple of weeks, it's been a roller coaster," Volk said. "We've gone from being No. 1 in the country to maybe going to the Holiday Bowl and then maybe a shot at the BCS and then, back to the Rose Bowl."

"We've been up and down and up again. I'm pretty happy right now."

Volk said it's incredibly strange how Nebraska was able to achieve so much without even playing a game.

"The best place to be the last couple of weeks was not on the field, it seemed like. Everybody that had a shot kind of lost it," Volk said. "I think the safest place the last couple of weeks was watching the games on TV."

Although Tennessee's loss opened the door for Nebraska, some nervous moments remained. The USA Today/ESPN coaches' poll reversed field and placed Colorado ahead of the Huskers — a move that most figured would put the 10-2 Buffaloes in the national championship game. But when the computers spit out the final official BCS standings, it was Nebraska that held down the No. 2 position, nipping Colorado by five-hundredths of a point.

Solich, who watched the conclusion of the LSU-Tennessee game in a New York airport before flying home from the Heisman Trophy presentation, said he wasn't entirely comfortable with the situation, but figured that the LSU win would put Nebraska in title game. The fact that several coaches changed their votes in favor of Colorado came as quite a surprise to Solich.

"If you look at the way coaches had voted the previous week . . . I felt that things would probably remain the same in that poll," Solich said. "I guess I would be inaccurate if I said it didn't disappoint me because I felt that certainly if change was warranted, it would have been made last week."

Not to be overlooked in the remarkable series of events that came together for the Huskers was Texas Christian's Dec. 7 win over Southern Mississippi. Nebraska beat the Horned Frogs 21-7 in the season opener and improved its strength-of-schedule rating slightly thanks to TCU's victory. As it turned out, every hundredth of a point mattered.

With so many things going Nebraska's way during a two-week stretch, the obvious question to Solich was if he felt the Huskers were a team of destiny?

"Up until now, I didn't really believe that much in fate," Solich said. "But I honestly believe that generally what happens is teams that are deserving get to where they're at. They have the kind of seasons that would indicate that they move on and there has to be some things that fall in place."

"It's been one of those seasons where you look back on it, and our team has played exceptionally well in 11 of 12 games and is being rewarded for that." ■



Dave Volk said NU has "been up and down and up again."

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the Grand Island Independent. He can be reached at tdbbdouglass@netzero.net.

It's The System

Late-season craziness brings more cries for Division I playoff



Curt McKEEVER

THE CRIES FOR an NCAA Division I college football playoff have never been louder than they are today.

Miami is the only team from any of the six shot-calling conferences to go unbeaten this season, and there's a lot of teams that have a right to believe they should be the Hurricanes' opponent in the Rose Bowl.

This situation is almost as jumbled as how the ruling factions in boxing try to decide who gets the next shot at Lennox Lewis.

There's a young guy, John Ruiz, who looks pretty good. But Mike Tyson is making a lot of noise. Perhaps Evander Holyfield has something left in his 39-year-old body? Or maybe it's the least-known contender, Wladimir Klitschko, who deserves a break?

Probably, whoever has the best promoter stands the best shot at being the next to step in the ring with Lewis.

In regard to who would get to face Miami, the same could have been said of the scene in Division I football entering the final weekend of regular-season play.

There was Tennessee, in control of its destiny heading into the Southeastern Conference championship after a win over Florida vaulted it up four spots to No. 2 in the Bowl Championship Series standings.

And granted, it's no easy chore to leave Gainesville with a victory, but the other top one-loss contenders for the No. 2 spot — Nebraska and Oregon — still had to wonder how they got leapfrogged?

Then, there's Colorado — which beat the Huskers by 26 points and avenged a 34-point loss to Texas. No one would argue that the Buffaloes weren't one of the hottest teams in the country — if not THE hottest. CU fans, though, were dumbfounded that the Buffaloes were still behind Nebraska in the BCS standings.

Losses are more than flesh wounds, though, and the Buffs, even with their Big 12 championship, had two on their resume.

Colorado center Wayne Lucier still admitted he and his teammates would have a hard time stomaching how a squad that didn't compete for a conference championship could end up playing for the national championship. And that's understandable (does anyone remember that CU finished the 1992 season ranked ahead of Big Eight champ NU even though it lost to the Huskers by 45 points?).

If Lucier wants to place blame for the cloudiness of the situation, that should be directed at the powers-that-be from the six conferences that decided the BCS system would be the best way to determine a national champion.

It's the same system that — had Oklahoma not choked against Oklahoma State, and then lost to Colorado in the Big 12 title game — would have sent Texas packing for

Pasadena to take on Miami.

How's that for fair?

"I believe in the system," said CU Coach Gary Barnett, who knows the BCS is what's been settled on to decide the national champ at least through the 2006 season. "There are some subjective aspects to the system, and I guess I'm just going to believe everybody will do the right thing."

"... If I were sitting on the outside, and was a voter and not involved, it'd be hard for me to put a team that had 62 points scored on them ahead of the team that scored the 62 points."

Of course, Barnett doesn't really know whether his team deserved to be higher in the BCS listing than a couple of other one-loss clubs — Maryland and Illinois.

And what about Brigham Young — the Klitschko of this bunch? No one wants to believe the Cougars could hang with the other heavyweights.

No one knows for sure, either.

Responding to a question about Colorado's position, Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne said if he were the Buffaloes' AD he'd "be arguing for a playoff."

Considering the logjam that exists near the top of the heap, it's too bad that can't happen this season.

Texas Tech Coach Mike Leach was suggesting Division I schools cut their regular-season schedule to 10 games and then have a 64-team playoff. That would mean the two that advanced to the championship would end up with a 16-game season.

Barnett's idea for a playoff would mirror numbers used to fill the NCAA basketball tournament. He'd have the same percentage of teams in football qualify.

Of course, under both of those proposals, there'd still be some schools who felt cheated about not being included. But for those who did make it, every game would be like this year's Rose Bowl.

The way it stands now for a lot of Division I schools, anything less than a trip to the BCS championship bowl is unimportant.

"I've always been a guy that didn't feel like we should have playoffs. It should be about sportsmanship and about fun," Texas Coach Mack Brown said. "It should be about going to bowls, and that 7-5 and 7-4 team that gets a chance to go for the first time ever, it's a great experience for those kids."

"(But) I think we've grown out of that right now, so if the only game that's important is the last one, then I think we should have a playoff to make sure that we have the best

No one doubts that one of this year's Rose Bowl entries belongs. The uproar is over who Miami is facing. ■



Gary Barnett and Colorado still trailed Nebraska in the BCS.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

The No.

Winning Heisman leaves Crouch at a loss for words

By Mike Babcock

And the winner is . . . Jim Corcoran, president of the Downtown Athletic Club in New York City, paused as he opened the envelope containing the name of the recipient of the 67th Heisman Trophy.

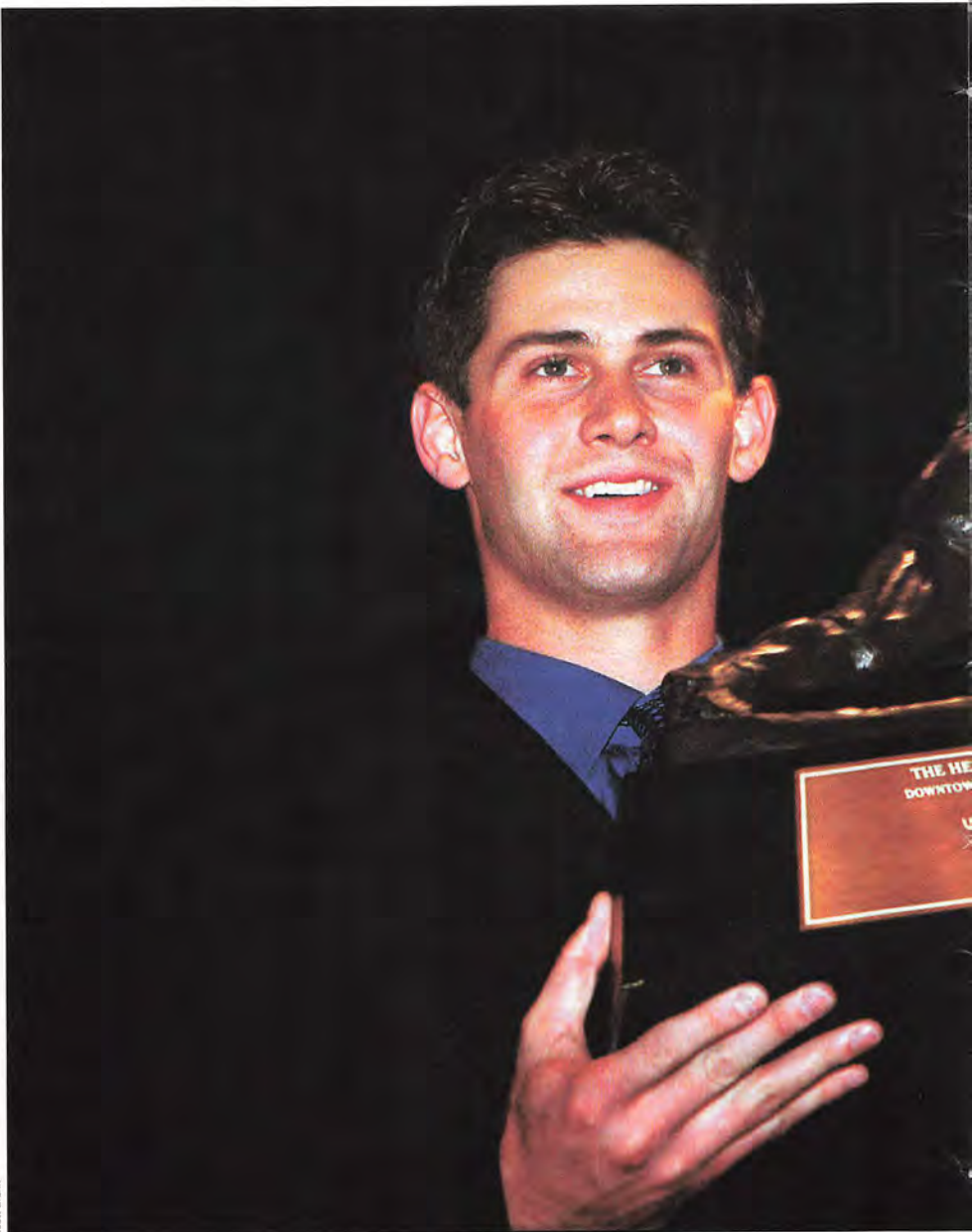
That name, of course, was Eric Crouch.

Corcoran made the announcement in a ballroom at the Marriott Marquis on Times Square, on the second Saturday in December. The Downtown Athletic Club, home of the Heisman Trophy, has been closed since the terrible events of Sept. 11 and might not re-open.

The suspense intensified during Corcoran's pause. A television camera for the ESPN cable network focused on Crouch and the other finalists, Oregon's Joey Harrington, Miami's Ken Dorsey and Florida's Rex Grossman. Harrington sat to Crouch's left, Dorsey and Grossman to his right.

When the words "Eric Crouch, University of Nebraska" registered, Crouch stood up and shook Harrington's extended right hand. The two hugged. On the way to the podium, Crouch also received hugs of congratulation from Dorsey and Grossman, as well as from Corcoran.

Those were the first moments of



Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch was named the winner of the Heisman Trophy during ceremonies at the Marriott Marquis in New York City on Dec. 8.

Crouch's life as a Heisman Trophy winner. His first words were: "Well, it's quite an honor to be up here today, and, uh, I'm at a loss for words."

The night before, during a telephone interview with Lincoln radio station KLIN, Crouch said he didn't plan to prepare remarks in the event he won the award as the best player in

college football.

Corcoran would describe the Heisman as "the most prestigious award in sports."

On the previous Tuesday, after learning that he was among the four candidates to be invited to New York City for the presentation ceremony, Crouch told reporters he was going to

1 Option



"expect the worst. I don't want to get my hopes up too high because the race is so tight this year," he said.

"I don't want to disappoint myself in anyway."

Even though he had emphasized throughout the season that team success not individual awards motivated him, Crouch coveted the Heisman, as any player would.

He admitted as much to reporters

The Voting

Name, School	1	2	3	Total
1. Eric Crouch, Nebraska	162	98	88	770
2. Rex Grossman, Florida	137	105	87	708
3. Ken Dorsey, Miami	109	122	67	638
4. Joey Harrington, Oregon	54	68	66	364
5. David Carr, Fresno, State	34	60	58	280
6. Antwaan Randle El, Indiana	46	69	51	267
7. Roy Williams, Oklahoma	13	36	35	146
8. Bryant McKinnie, Miami	26	12	14	116
9. Dwight Freeney, Syracuse	2	6	24	42
10. Julius Peppers, North Carolina	2	10	15	41

the day before the announcement. During a brief acceptance speech, he said receiving the Heisman "has been the most anticipated thing in my life.

Crouch's chances of joining Johnny Rodgers (1972) and Mike Rozier (1983) as Nebraska's third Heisman Trophy winner seemed to diminish following the Cornhuskers' 62-36 loss at Colorado, even though he shattered the school single-game total-offense record with 360 yards.

Gene Wojciechowski, senior writer for ESPN The Magazine, was among those coming to Crouch's defense. "Sure, Nebraska got waxed by the Buffs," he wrote. "But it wasn't Crouch's fault."

And by the time Heisman ballots had to be received by an accounting firm in Connecticut in the late afternoon of the day before the presentation ceremony, enough voters agreed.

Crouch's vote total was 770, 62 more than Grossman, the runner-up. The race was the closest since 1985 (Bo Jackson), and the fourth closest all-time. Crouch received the fewest first-place votes since 1978 (Billy Sims). And he carried only one of the Heisman's six geographic voting regions.

The last Heisman winner to do that was Ernie Davis in 1961.

Crouch carried the Southwest Region, which includes Nebraska.

Crouch's credentials for the trophy, which had never gone to an option quarterback in the modern era, were impeccable. He rushed for 1,115 yards and 18 touchdowns and passed for 1,510 yards and seven touchdowns, becoming one of only 13 Division I-A quarterbacks to rush and pass for 1,000 or more yards in the same season. His rushing yardage was more than double that of any previous Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback. Oregon State's Terry Baker ran for 538 yards in 1962.

Crouch also caught a touchdown pass from Mike Stuntz, a 63-yard play against Oklahoma that was "Heismanesque," as was his school-record 95-yard touchdown run at Missouri.

Although the Heisman Trophy is typically regarded as a season-specific award rather than one based on career achievement, Crouch qualified in the latter sense as well. He holds six NCAA records, several Big 12 records and a decided majority of Cornhusker quarterback records.

Crouch's accomplishments have been such that Nebraska quarterbacks coach Turner Gill described Crouch as the best he has coached. Crouch's



Nebraska's three Heisman Trophy winners, (from left) Johnny Rodgers, Eric Crouch and Mike Rozier, get together in New York.

The Winners

Year	Player	School	Pos.	Year	Player	School	Pos.	Year	Player	School	Pos.
2001	Eric Crouch	Nebraska	QB	1980	George Rogers	South Carolina	RB	1957	John David Crow	Texas A&M	HB
2000	Chris Weinke	Florida State	QB	1979	Charles White	Southern Cal.	RB	1956	Paul Hornung	Notre Dame	QB
1999	Ron Dayne	Wisconsin	TB	1978	Billy Sims	Oklahoma	RB	1955	Howard Cassady	Ohio State	HB
1998	Ricky Williams	Texas	TB	1977	Earl Campbell	Texas	RB	1954	Alan Ameche	Wisconsin	FB
1997	Charles Woodson	Michigan	DB	1976	Tony Dorsett	Pittsburgh	RB	1953	Johnny Lattner	Notre Dame	HB
1996	Danny Wuerffel	Florida	QB	1975	Archie Griffin	Ohio State	RB	1952	Billy Vessels	Oklahoma	HB
1995	Eddie George	Ohio State	RB	1974	Archie Griffin	Ohio State	RB	1951	Dick Kazmaier	Princeton	HB
1994	Rashaan Salaam	Colorado	RB	1973	John Cappelletti	Penn State	RB	1950	Vic Janowicz	Ohio State	HB
1993	Charlie Ward	Florida State	QB	1972	Johnny Rodgers	Nebraska	WR	1949	Leon Hart	Notre Dame	E
1992	Gino Torretta	Miami	QB	1971	Pat Sullivan	Auburn	QB	1948	Doak Walker	SMU	HB
1991	Desmond Howard	Michigan	WR	1970	Jim Plunkett	Stanford	QB	1947	Johnny Lujack	Notre Dame	QB
1990	Ty Detmer	BYU	QB	1969	Steve Owens	Oklahoma	HB	1946	Glenn Davis	Army	HB
1989	Andre Ware	Houston	QB	1968	O.J. Simpson	Southern Cal.	HB	1945	Doc Blanchard	Army	FB
1988	Barry Sanders	Oklahoma St.	RB	1967	Gary Beban	UCLA	QB	1944	Les Horvath	Ohio State	QB/HB
1987	Tim Brown	Notre Dame	WR	1966	Steve Spurrier	Florida	QB	1943	Angelo Bertelli	Notre Dame	QB
1986	Vinny Testaverde	Miami	QB	1965	Mike Garrett	Southern Cal.	HB	1942	Frank Sinkwich	Georgia	HB
1985	Bo Jackson	Auburn	RB	1964	John Huarte	Notre Dame	QB	1941	Bruce Smith	Minnesota	HB
1984	Doug Flutie	Boston College	QB	1963	Roger Staubach	Navy	QB	1940	Tom Harmon	Michigan	HB
1983	Mike Rozier	Nebraska	RB	1962	Terry Baker	Oregon State	QB	1939	Nile Kinnick	Iowa	HB
1982	Herschel Walker	Georgia	RB	1961	Ernie Davis	Syracuse	HB	1938	Davey O'Brien	TCU	QB
1981	Marcus Allen	Southern Cal.	RB	1960	Joe Bellino	Navy	HB	1937	Clint Frank	Yale	HB
				1959	Billy Cannon	LSU	HB	1936	Larry Kelley	Yale	E
				1958	Pete Dawkins	Army	HB	1935	Jay Berwanger	Chicago	HB

speed sets him apart, Gill said.

Competitiveness is what sets Crouch apart, according to Coach Frank Solich. "Guys that win the Heisman Trophy are that way," Solich said. "They show up and produce every football game, and that's what Eric has done. I think all of that comes back to his competitiveness as well as his outstanding athletic ability. In saying all of that, I guess the type of person Eric is also enters in.

"He's been so humble and has been so team-oriented. When you have a guy with his athletic ability, that doesn't always end up being the case. But he was that way and put his team first."

Crouch had to deal with talk of the Heisman Trophy throughout the season. But he always tried to shift the focus to the team and its success. Winning was the bottom line.

"If you think about it, it seems like

the teams that are the most successful their best player is usually in the hunt for the Heisman, if not in the top four," he said in mid-November.

"I'm definitely team-oriented, and I'm not going to think about winning the Heisman Trophy at all. If I'm there at the awards ceremony, that's fine. If I'm not, that's fine, too."

As it turned out, he was at the awards ceremony.

And he was the winner. ■

The Speech

"Well, it's quite an honor to be up here today and, uh, I'm at a loss for words. But the first thing that I want to do, I just want to thank God for making this possible. Without Him, I don't know where I'd be right now. I also want to thank my family, first and foremost my mother, who has given me the strength and the courage and everything to be able to be here today and the qualities to be the type of player and the type of person that I am. I want to thank my father, his wife Marlene. I also want to thank my mother's husband Cory for just the support that they have and everything that they've helped me do.

"I just want to let them know that anything that I've done wasn't just because of myself; it was because of the help from them. And I also want to thank my girlfriend Nikki and my brother Kyle and my sister Mikaela for just the support they've given me. It's just been fantastic to be able to come home and see what type of people they are and what type of reflections they have on life and the support that I get from them. So it's been a great thing and breath-taking in a lot of ways.

"I also want to thank my mentor Jim Brown, who has been just a great guy. And he has given me a lot of advice over the years and without him there would be a lot of question marks in my mind at this point. I also want to thank the other athletes. Any one of these guys is very deserving of this award. And I've just been honored to be here with each and every one of you guys, you know. Down to the minute, this has been the most anticipated thing in my life and so I just want to thank them personally for giving me this opportunity. In the last three or four days, they've been the greatest people to be around, and I've enjoyed myself greatly. I also want to thank Wendy's for the sponsor and everything they've done in making this whole thing possible. I just want to say I'm so excited to be part of this elite group of players.

"I just want to say thank you to everybody. Thank you very much."

Among those who attended the ceremony were Crouch's mother Susan and stepfather Cory Sanchez, his father Ron and stepmother Marlene, his brother Kyle and stepsister Mikaela, and his grandparents John and Darlene O'Donnell. Coach Frank Solich, Athletic Director Bill Byrne and position coach Turner Gill also attended, as did other friends, among them his high school football coach Fred Petito. ■

How Could That Happen?

Even though Eric Crouch was named the Walter Camp Player of the Year but he wasn't included on the Walter Camp All-America team. How could that happen?

"I'm not sure," Coach Frank Solich said. "I kind of wondered that myself."

The award, presented annually to college football's best player, is chosen in a vote of selected NCAA Division I-A head coaches and sports information directors. The other finalists were Florida quarterback Rex Grossman, Miami quarterback Ken Dorsey and Oklahoma safety Roy Williams.

Grossman, the Heisman runner-up to Crouch, was chosen as the quarterback on the Walter Camp All-America

team, which included Cornhusker junior offensive guard Toniui Fonoti.

Crouch was the first player to be named the Walter Camp Player of the Year and not be included on the All-America team since the Player of the Year award was established in 1967.

The Walter Camp Player of the Year also has won the Heisman Trophy every season except 1990 (Notre Dame's Raghieb Ismail) and 2000 (Oklahoma's Josh Heupel). Crouch also received the Davey O'Brien Award, presented annually to the nation's best collegiate quarterback. Solich said he was especially pleased that Crouch, an option quarterback, was voted that award. ■

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Str

Long and winding road finally leads to Pasadena

By Mike Babcock

Keyuo Craver called Frank Solich on the morning of the day Bowl Championship Series officials announced that Nebraska would play Miami in the Rose Bowl game. Craver told Solich he was calling to ask if there was anything he could do to help cope with the pressure.

The Cornhuskers wouldn't find out they were headed to the Rose Bowl until mid-afternoon, and as the two talked, Solich said, he concluded that Craver was the one needing the help.

A day later, Craver smiled in recalling the conversation. Solich "was pulling hair out of his head just like I was, too," said Craver. "So I think it was a comfort zone for both of us.

"I did call the man. But he was doing the same thing I was doing."

DeJuan Groce was shopping at Sam's Club when the announcement was telecast on ABC. Actually, he was playing with computers near where a crowd had gathered around a television set in the electronics department. He knew by the reaction that Nebraska would be going to Pasadena.

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said his team was deserving of the spot in the national championship game.

Scott Bawa

Change Brew

His heart began beating faster, he said. "Oh, my God, I can't believe it's happening."

When he went to bed Saturday night, Groce was confident the Cornhuskers would get the Rose Bowl bid. Louisiana State's 31-20 victory against Tennessee in the Southeastern Conference championship game seemed to be the final step in an unlikely set of circumstances that would give it to them.

However, after he saw the coaches' poll, which had moved Colorado ahead of Nebraska even though neither had played that weekend, he began to waver in his belief that would really happen.

"It was kind of nerve wracking when I found that out," he said. "Why would they change?"

Solich had no answer for why. "That was certainly somewhat surprising to me," he said.

Surprising, and disappointing. "It would be inaccurate if I said it didn't disappoint me because I felt that if a change was warranted, it would have been made last week," said Solich.

Even though Colorado defeated Texas in the Big 12 championship game, the Buffaloes had remained one place behind Nebraska in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll.

After a week of unabashed lobbying by some on the national media, enough of the 60 coaches had been persuaded to change their votes to boost Colorado from fifth to third in the aftermath of LSU's upset. Had Tennessee won, such a change wouldn't have been needed. Tennessee would have played Miami in the Rose Bowl, and Nebraska would have gone to the Sugar Bowl to play Illinois.

Tennessee was the final hope for the BCS to avoid the controversy that was bound to attend Nebraska's first Rose Bowl bid in 60 years. The Cornhuskers were erased from the

Final BCS Rankings

Team	Poll			Schedule			Comp. Qual.		
	AP	USA	Avg	SS	Rank	L	Avg	Win	Total
1. Miami (11-0)	1	1	1.0	18	0.72	0	1.00	0.1	2.62
2. Nebraska (11-1)	4	4	4.0	14	0.56	1	2.17	0.5	7.23
3. Colorado (10-2)	3	3	3.0	2	0.08	2	4.50	2.3	7.28
4. Oregon (10-1)	2	2	2.0	31	1.24	1	4.83	0.4	8.67
5. Florida (9-2)	5	5	5.0	19	0.76	2	5.83	0.5	13.09
6. Tennessee (10-2)	8	8	8.0	3	0.12	2	6.17	1.6	14.69
7. Texas (10-2)	9	9	9.0	33	1.32	2	6.67	1.2	17.79
8. Illinois (10-1)	7	7	7.0	37	1.48	1	9.83	0.0	19.31
9. Stanford (9-2)	11	11	11.0	22	0.88	2	7.83	1.3	20.41
10. Maryland (10-1)	6	6	6.0	78	3.12	1	11.17	0.0	21.29
11. Oklahoma (10-2)	10	10	10.0	36	1.44	2	9.00	0.9	21.54
12. Wash. St. (9-2)	13	13	13.0	42	1.68	2	10.83	0.6	26.91
13. LSU (9-3)	12	12	12.0	10	0.40	3	13.33	1.0	27.73
14. S. Carolina (8-3)	14	14	14.0	40	1.60	3	19.17	0.0	37.77
15. Washington (8-3)	21	20	20.5	21	0.84	3	14.83	1.0	38.17

national title picture following their 62-36 loss at Colorado, as far as many national analysts were concerned.

But the complicated formula used to determine the teams in the BCS national championship game includes factors not influenced by human emotion, including eight computer rankings.

And the computers weren't affected by the embarrassment of that lone loss.

What did affect them were several games played after Nebraska's ill-fated trip to Boulder, beginning with Oklahoma's 16-13 loss against Oklahoma State at Norman the next day and ending with Tennessee's surprising stumble, engineered by a back-up quarterback, two weeks later.

During those two weeks, the Cornhuskers went full circle. They went to Colorado knowing that with a victory there and another in the Big 12 championship game, they would be headed to the Rose Bowl. They were No. 1 in the BCS rankings and, as such, in control of their own destiny.

Colorado took it out of their hands, and they left Folsom Field expecting a trip to the Holiday Bowl. Then, following Oklahoma's loss, it appeared they might get a BCS bowl after all.

And then, following Colorado's 39-37 victory against Texas in the Big 12 title game, coupled with Tennessee's 34-32 upset of Florida and Oregon's unimpressive 17-14 victory against Oregon State at home, Nebraska found itself with a second chance at going to the Rose Bowl.

Immediately after the Colorado loss, the odds against all of the things happening that needed to happen for the Cornhuskers to get to Pasadena were "astronomical," said Dave Volk.

And if not for the computer component in the BCS formula, there wouldn't have been any odds. The computers "take a look at the entire season," Volk said. And "that's what got us there."

If left to the polls, as was the case before 1998 when the BCS rankings were established, the Rose Bowl

The Series

Nebraska leads 5-4

- 1951** — Miami 19, Nebraska 7 (A)
- 1953** — Nebraska 20, Miami 16 (H)
- 1962** — Nebraska 36, Miami 34*
- 1975** — Nebraska 31, Miami 16 (H)
- 1976** — Nebraska 17, Miami 9 ((H)
- 1983** — Miami 31, Nebraska 30**
- 1988** — Miami 23, Nebraska 3***
- 1991** — Miami 22, Nebraska 0****
- 1994** — Nebraska 24, Miami 17*****

*1962 Gotham Bowl

**1984 Orange Bowl

***1989 Orange Bowl

****1992 Orange Bowl

*****1995 Orange Bowl

would have matched Miami against Oregon, which was second in both polls. But the Ducks were fourth in the BCS rankings, behind Colorado as well as Miami and Nebraska.

Because of the change in the coaches' poll, Colorado was only a fraction of a point behind Nebraska in the final rankings — .05, to be exact. That difference depended on Texas Christian's 14-12 victory against Southern Mississippi on the Friday before the SEC championship game. The victory gave TCU a winning record (6-5) and enhanced the Cornhuskers' strength of schedule component.

There were other factors throughout the season, including Colorado's

two losses and the fact it didn't reschedule a game against Washington State, canceled by the events of Sept. 11. If the Buffaloes had played Washington State and won, they would have been headed to the Rose Bowl. If . . .

Likewise, if Nebraska hadn't rescheduled its game against Rice, which also was jeopardized by what happened on Sept. 11, that would have worked in Colorado's favor, too. The Owls finished with an 8-4 record, another significant factor in the Cornhuskers' strength of schedule. If . . .

There were no ifs about Nebraska until the Cornhuskers traveled to Colorado.

"When I look back on it, our team has played exceptionally well in 11 out of 12 games and has been rewarded for that," Solich said on the day the Rose Bowl bid was extended.

"It's been a strange season in the last two weeks in terms of how things have played out. We've had to certainly look at it from the standpoint that a lot of things had to go our way in order to get into this game (Rose Bowl). A lot of those things were somewhat unforeseen, but they all fell into place."

But that neither diminishes the opportunity, nor calls into question Nebraska's right to be playing in Pasadena on Jan. 3. "This team is deserving of being in a national championship game," he said. "So I feel very good about complimenting them on their season rather than trying to defend them."

As for the players, "this is a big second chance," said Dahrran Diedrick.

Volk understands the basis for complaints. He's philosophical about the situation. "It does matter how we got there a little bit," he said. "We wouldn't have had all this controversy if we would have won out. But we are where we are, and the system is how it is. We'll take it."

"I don't know if we're a team of destiny. It just worked out for us this year."

The loss at Colorado was an aberration, the first in what has been a series of aberrations that have brought the Cornhuskers full circle. "We started it," Volk said. "And it's contagious, I guess." ■



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Hurricane Warning

*Huskers know
they have their work
cut out for them*

The match-up between Nebraska's receivers and Miami's secondary will be among many factors that will determine the outcome of the Rose Bowl game — and the BCS national champion.

Junior split end Wilson Thomas, the Cornhuskers' leading receiver, acknowledged that during a news conference on the day Nebraska found out it would be Miami's opponent.

Going into the season, Miami's secondary, which is led by senior All-America free safety Edward Reed, was rated among the nation's best, Thomas said, and it has proven to be that.

The Hurricanes have intercepted 27 passes, including nine by Reed, who has returned two for touchdowns. He also has broken up nine passes and recovered two fumbles.

Cornerback Phillip Buchanon has intercepted five passes.

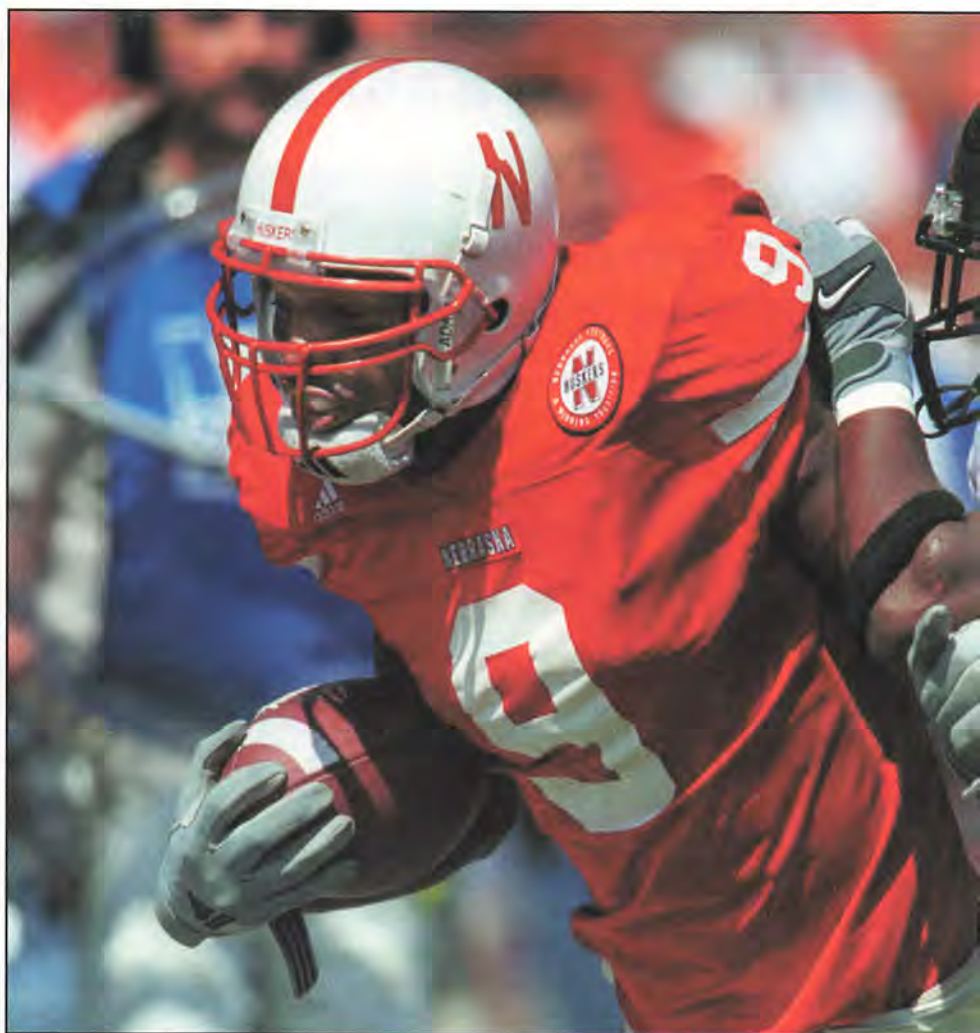
Thomas, who has caught 37 passes for 616 yards and three touchdowns, said he's ready for the challenge, adding, "That's what you want to do, go against the best each game."

"Receivers at Nebraska are often looked at as being the weakest part of the chain, so I guess it's our weakness and their strength," he said. "We'll see which one prevails."

The Hurricanes' first concern defensively, however, will be stopping Nebraska's running game.

Miami's offense doesn't depend entirely on the pass, although quarterback Ken Dorsey, who finished third behind Eric Crouch in voting for the Heisman Trophy, has impressive passing statistics. Dorsey has completed 184-of-318 for 2,652 yards and 23 touchdowns with only nine interceptions.

The Hurricanes' leading receivers are junior Jeremy Shockey and sophomore Andre Johnson. Shockey, a 6-foot-6, 236-pound tight end, has caught 40 passes for 519 yards and seven touchdowns, while Johnson



Wilson Thomas, Nebraska's leading receiver, is ready to face the challenge of Miami's highly regarded secondary.

has 37 pass receptions for 682 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Clinton Portis is the key figure in Miami's running game. The 5-11, 195-pound junior has rushed for 1,200 yards and 10 touchdowns behind a line that includes All-America tackles Bryant McKinnie and Joaquin Gonzalez. The 6-9, 335-pound McKinnie is this season's Outland Trophy winner.

McKinnie, the left tackle, has never allowed a quarterback sack.

"He's never given up a sack even in practice," Cornhusker rush end Chris Kelsay said. "We put up big numbers this year as far as sacks and putting pressure on the quarterback, so it's going to be a huge task."

Nebraska has had 39 sacks for 328 yards in losses.

Portis has rushed for 100 or more

yards in 14 games during his career, tying Edgerrin James for the school record. Eight of those games were this season, tying Ottis Anderson for that school record. Portis is only the fifth player in Miami school history to rush for 1,000 or more yards in a season.

James accomplished that feat twice and holds the school record, 1,416 yards in 1998.

The Hurricanes rank third in the nation in scoring (43.18) and eighth in total offense (454.82). Containing them is "going to be a great challenge," said Nebraska strongside linebacker Scott Shanle. "I've seen those guys play a few times this year. They're a very balanced offense."

"We've got our work cut out for us with Miami because they're a great team," Kelsay said. ■

Celebration Followed 1941 Rose Bowl Bid

*Several things had
to fall into place
for Huskers to earn
first bowl bid*

Snow fell, driven by a bitter wind that pushed the temperature to near zero. But the Nebraska students were undaunted, parading through the night to the home of head football coach Biff Jones.

A few hours earlier the Cornhuskers had received an invitation to play Pacific Coast Conference champion Stanford in the Rose Bowl game. And the students were bent on celebrating.

The commotion brought Jones, dressed in pajamas, to a window. The students cheered. "Join us." Jones responded by pulling on trousers and a topcoat and going out into the night.

The celebration continued the next day, spreading from campus to community. Factory whistles blew non-stop and the streets of Lincoln were crowded with "students, bands, housewives, businessmen, moppets, tots and what have you," according to a newspaper account.

Chancellor Chauncey Boucher canceled Monday classes at the university, and some of the more enthusiastic students converged on the state Capitol, ignoring "keep off the grass" signs and demanding that the governor join them in singing "There Is No Place Like Nebraska."

The Cornhuskers' Rose Bowl invitation constituted the "biggest moment since the territory of Nebraska became one of the 48 states," a Lincoln newspaper reported.

Though controversy didn't attend the invitation the way it has this year's Rose Bowl bid, several things had to fall into place in order for the



Biff Jones, a former Army major, succeeded D.X. Bible as Nebraska's coach in 1937. After leading NU to its first bowl game following the 1940 season, Jones coached just one more season before he was called to serve in World War II.

Cornhuskers to bring in the new year, 1941, by playing in their first bowl game. Most significant of those things was a Texas victory against Texas A&M.

The Aggies were undefeated and untied and prime candidates for the Rose Bowl bid when they played their archrival on Thanksgiving Day. But Texas pulled the upset, 7-0.

Longhorns Coach D.X. Bible said the victory was among his most satisfying because it had helped Nebraska. Bible was Jones' predecessor as the Cornhuskers' coach.

Minnesota would have been a logical choice to play Stanford since it was No. 1 in the Associated Press poll and Stanford was No. 2. But the Gophers were prohibited from post-season play because of Big Nine Conference rules. Ivy League champion Pennsylvania declined all bowl offers that season. And the Rose Bowl passed on Tennessee, which had lost to USC in the previous year's game.

In addition, Nebraska and Stanford had established a good relationship.

And as Pacific Coast Conference champion, Stanford was included in the bowl selection process.

Norm Standlee, a player, was a member of the selection committee.

The Cornhuskers were worthy opponents, having won eight in a row after a 13-7 loss at perennial nemesis Minnesota in their season opener. They were ranked No. 7 in the AP poll.

Although it had never played in a bowl game, Nebraska enjoyed national prominence. It "hasn't really had a second rate football team in upward of 25 years," a Los Angeles newspaper reported.

That success was achieved despite the fact "the Huskers are playing what campus cynics call 'student football' back there in Lincoln, meaning that all is chaste and pure," the story said.

Nebraska's players, all but one of whom was from the state, didn't receive scholarship aid and many of them had to work their way through school. Vike Francis changed records in jukeboxes. Allen Zikmund was a

janitor at a dress shop. Hank Rohn was a shipping clerk. Roy Petsch worked in the classified department at the Nebraska State Journal. And Herm Rohrig worked at a soft drink plant.

The players earned, on the average, about 35 cents an hour.

In contrast, Stanford, located in Palo Alto, Calif., attracted players from seven states besides California. Five of the Indians' (now Cardinal) 11 starters were from out of state.

The teams had contrasting styles. First-year Coach Clark Shaughnessy effected a dramatic turnaround at Stanford, 1-7-1 in 1939, by installing a T-formation offense, directed by diminutive, left-handed quarterback Frankie Albert. The offense put men in motion, and relied on speed and deception.

Jones' offense was built on geographic necessity. "Like most of the clubs in this section, where the temperature is too unpredictable to build an attack around a passing game, Nebraska depends chiefly on a savage ground attack," a Lincoln newspaper reported as Nebraska prepared to head west. "The Cornhuskers rely on power through the middle and the tackles for most of their gains."

That's how Nebraska took a quick 7-0 lead, on the running of Francis, its big fullback.

By the end of the first quarter, Stanford had tied the score. But the Cornhuskers regained the lead in the second quarter on a 33-yard touchdown pass from Rohrig to Zikmund.

The extra-point kick failed, however, enabling Stanford to take a 14-13 lead to the locker room at halftime on a 41-yard touchdown pass from Albert to Hugh Gallarneau.

Those were all the points the Indians needed, though Pete Kmetovic's 39-yard punt return in the third quarter enabled the Stanford fans in the sellout crowd to 92,000 to breathe a little easier.

Kmetovic's return came on the heels of a Nebraska goal-line stand.

Despite the final score, the Cornhuskers distinguished themselves in Pasadena on that 90-degree afternoon. And they were regarded with great affection for years to come.

Hall of Fame Coach Bob Devaney often joked that he had been at Nebraska for the better part of a year before he found out that the Cornhuskers hadn't won the 1941 Rose Bowl game. ■

NU's 1941 Rose Bowl Starters

Pos.	Player	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown
Left end	Fred Preston	6-3	191	Jr.	Fairbury
Left tackle	Royal Kahler	6-3	220	Sr.	Grand Island
Left guard	Ed Schwartzkopf	5-9 1/2	175	Jr.	Lincoln
Center	Robert Burress	5-10 1/2	188	Sr.	Omaha
Right guard	Warren Alfson	6-0 1/2	188	Sr.	Wisner
Right tackle	Forrest Behm	6-4	200	Sr.	Lincoln
Right end	Ray Prochaska	6-3	198	Sr.	Ulysses
Quarterback	Roy Petsch	6-1	175	Sr.	Scottsbluff
Left halfback	Harry Hopp	5-11	198	Sr.	Hastings
Right halfback	Walter Luther	6-0	180	Sr.	Cambridge
Fullback	Vike Francis	6-2	201	Jr.	Lincoln



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He Hates to Lose

Miami's junior quarterback says he doesn't need awards to be happy

**By Gary Ferman
CaneSport**

Hurricane junior quarterback Ken Dorsey doesn't ask for much. The way he tells it, he doesn't care about finishing third in the Heisman Trophy voting, or that the quarterback on the other side of the Rose Bowl sidelines, Eric Crouch, won college football's most prestigious award.

"The trophy would (have been) great, but I'd rather have a ring on my finger," said Dorsey, who instead settled for the Maxwell Award as college football's most outstanding player.

Dorsey said he doesn't need awards to remain happy.

He points to three things he needs in life to keep him smiling — wins in football, a television and a video game console.

Watching television is his favorite activity when he's not on the field, and he likes to watch one kind of show — cartoons.

"The old ones are the best," he said.

The video game console is for when his teammates come over — he likes to challenge them in football games.

"If you beat him, he won't let you leave until he beats you right back," running back Clinton Portis said.

That's one thing about Dorsey — he hates to lose.

So it's a good thing he hasn't had much of that in his Hurricanes career.

Dorsey's lost only one game as a starter at Miami — last year at Washington. His .962 winning per-



Miami junior quarterback Ken Dorsey, who finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting, completed 57.9 percent of his passes for 2,652 yards and 23 touchdowns. He threw nine interceptions and was sacked only three times.

centage tops the Miami all-time charts.

He's at the top of another major category as well — he has 58 career touchdowns. That puts him first all-time at Miami, ahead of past Hurricane greats like Gino Torretta, Vinny Testaverde, Bernie Kosar, Jim Kelly and Steve Walsh.

"It's an honor to be in the record book with some great players who are also friends of mine," Dorsey said. "I wanted the record more just to give them a hard time."

"The one (record) I want is completion percentage and stuff like that, the ones no one really cares about. I think the best record I have right now is going the longest without an interception."

Dorsey prides himself on not turning the ball over.

He has pinpoint accuracy, and this season he's completed 57.9 percent of his passes for 2,652 yards with 23 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Two of those interceptions were the result of passes that his receivers bobbled.

He enjoyed a breakout sophomore season in 2000 when he completed 58.4 percent of his passes for 2,737 yards with 25 touchdowns and five interceptions. That was his first year as a full-time starter.

Miami Coach Larry Coker summed up Dorsey's stellar play by saying, "He's probably the best college quarterback I've been around. He has vision, and the big thing for a quarterback is being able to make decisions. We're very glad he's our quarterback."

Not every ball Dorsey touches

turns to gold, though.

He's struggled in games this season against Boston College, which was the only game in which he did not throw at least one touchdown, and Virginia Tech, in which he passed for 235 yards with one score. Those were the only two games in which he did not complete at least 50 percent of his passes.

The game against the Eagles was particularly disastrous for Dorsey, as he threw four interceptions. But he came back the following week and threw four touchdown passes with no interceptions against Syracuse. He has thrown for two or more touchdowns in eight games this season, and he has two games in which he passed for more than 300 yards — against Penn State and Rutgers in UM's first two games this season.

Miami hung on to win the games in which Dorsey struggled — the Hurricanes defeated Boston College 18-7 and Virginia Tech, 26-24.

That's what mattered most to Dorsey.

"(I looked at) why I had four interceptions and learned from that," Dorsey said. "A lot of it was trying to force stuff. (I learned) not to throw it to the guys in other colored jerseys. I don't think it was a problem with mechanics, it was just forcing and not taking the easy throws which have made me successful here.

"Every national championship team has gone through tests. This team's no different. The important thing about it is we came out with wins. That's the way we're looking at it. The only thing that matters to this team is winning football games."

Entering this season, there was some concern as to whether Dorsey had the physical stature to remain healthy an entire season. He's a string bean at 6-foot-5 and 210 pounds, but he put on 25 pounds of muscle in the offseason. He went from squatting 275 pounds in the spring to 315 pounds in the fall.

"Check out these muscles," Dorsey likes to say, flexing.

It also helps that the laid-back kid from Miramonte, Calif., has one of the nation's top offensive lines pass-blocking for him.

How often is an offensive line upset after its quarterback ends a game with a grass stain on his back?

This line was after the Pittsburgh game. The line didn't allow a sack of Dorsey until the seventh game this

season against Temple. Dorsey was sacked just three times all season. Backup quarterback Derrick Crudup was sacked once.

"I don't want the other team to even see the quarterback," said tackle Bryant McKinnie, the Outland Trophy winner as the nation's top interior lineman. "We're solid."

Dorsey doesn't take any chances even with the stellar line in front of him.

He always follows certain pre-game rituals.

That's right, he's superstitious.

On the way to games he always sits in the same seat on the team bus, and he listens to only two songs over and over again.

He won't say what they are — that might bring on a hex.

The only thing he'll say is, "It's a rock-type thing. It's not heavy metal or AC/DC or anything like that. I use it more as a calming thing."

He'll take the songs with him to Pasadena.

And, for Dorsey, going to the Rose Bowl holds a special significance because he grew up in Miramonte, Calif.

In his final two seasons at Miramonte High he threw for 4,968 yards and 52 touchdowns, leading his team to a combined 24-2 record.

"I grew up watching (the Rose Bowl)," Dorsey said. "I can't wait to go there and play." ■

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2001 Results

(Team's final record)

1 Aug. 25	TCU (6-5), W 21-7	1-0
2 Sept. 1	Troy State (7-4), W 42-14	2-0
3 Sept. 8	Notre Dame (5-6), W 27-10	3-0
4 Sept. 20	Rice (8-4), W 48-3	4-0
5 Sept. 29	@ Missouri (4-7), W 36-3	5-0
6 Oct. 6	Iowa State (7-4), W 48-14	6-0
7 Oct. 13	@ Baylor (3-8), W 48-7	7-0
8 Oct. 20	Texas Tech (7-4), W 41-31	8-0
9 Oct. 27	Oklahoma (10-2), W 20-10	9-0
10 Nov. 3	@ Kansas (3-8), W 51-7	10-0
11 Nov. 10	Kansas State (6-5), W 31-21	11-0
12 Nov. 23	@ Colorado (9-2), L 62-36	11-1



Larry Coker, in his seventh season at Miami and his first as head coach, has some history in facing Nebraska. From 1990-92, Coker was offensive coordinator at Oklahoma. Before heading to Norman, he spent seven seasons as offensive coordinator at Oklahoma State, where he coached 1988 Heisman Trophy winner Barry Sanders. Prior to becoming Miami's 19th head coach, Coker served under Butch Davis as the Canes' offensive coordinator and quarterback coach. Coker's hiring marked the first time in 25 years that Miami elevated a current assistant to head coach. Prior to his arrival at Miami in 1995, Coker spent the previous two seasons at Ohio State coaching the defensive backs.

Miami's 2001 Results

Sept. 1	at Penn State, W 33-7
Sept. 8	Rutgers, W 61-0
Sept. 27	at Pittsburgh, W 43-21
Oct. 6	Troy State, W 38-7
Oct. 13	at Florida State, W 49-27
Oct. 25	West Virginia, W 45-3
Nov. 3	Temple, W 38-0
Nov. 10	at Boston College, W 18-7
Nov. 17	Syracuse, W 59-0
Nov. 24	Washington, W 65-7
Dec. 1	at Virginia Tech, W 26-24

Game 13

Miami
Jan. 3, 2002

Location: Miami, Fla.

Enrollment: 14,436

2001 record: 11-0

Coach: Larry Coker, 1st season

Series: Nebraska leads 5-4



7 p.m. CST (ABC)

Rose Bowl, Pasadena, Calif.

Hurricane to Watch

Miami senior free safety Edward Reed was named the Football News 2001 Defensive Player of the Year.

Reed, who led the nation's top scoring defense with an NCAA-best nine interceptions, earned the honor over Oklahoma safety Roy Williams, linebackers Robert Thomas of UCLA and E.J. Henderson of Maryland, and



Syracuse defensive end Dwight Freeney.

Reed finished the regular season as the Miami career interceptions leader with 21, eclipsing the old Miami mark of 19 set by Bennie Blades (1983-87). The St. Rose, La., product also notched consensus first-team All-America honors for the second consecutive season.

Quick Facts

Nebraska and Miami have met five times in the postseason, with the Hurricanes holding a 3-2 advantage. Overall, the schools have played nine times, with the Huskers holding a 5-4 edge. Miami has won three of the last four meetings since its memorable 31-30 Orange Bowl victory Jan. 2, 1984, that produced the school's first national championship. That was the game in which Nebraska went for two points and the victory after scoring with 48 seconds remaining.

In the last meeting, the 1995 Orange Bowl, Nebraska won 24-17 to give former coach Tom Osborne his first national title.

First-year defensive coordinator Randy Shannon was named winner of the Broyles Award as the nation's top assistant. Miami has the No. 1-rated scoring defense, allowing 9.36 points per game. The Canes are No. 2 in pass defense (138.18 ypg) and have recorded the most takeaways this season (45), including a national-best 27 interceptions.

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE	9	Wilson Thomas**	6-6	215	Jr.
	81	Ben Cornelsen*	5-10	190	Jr.
LT	58	Dave Volk***	6-5	300	Sr.
	73	Scott Koethe*	6-5	310	Jr.
LG	77	Toniui Fonoti**	6-4	340	Jr.
	78	Mike Erickson	6-4	300	Fr.
C	52	John Garrison**	6-4	285	Jr.
	53	Matt Shook*	6-2	300	Jr.
RG	66	Jon Rutherford***	6-3	300	Sr.
	59	Wes Cody*	6-2	295	Jr.
RT	68	Dan Waldrop*	6-5	330	So.
	66	Jon Rutherford***	6-3	300	Sr.
TE	87	Tracey Wistrom***	6-5	240	Sr.
	99	Aaron Golliday**	6-4	285	Jr.
QB	7	Eric Crouch***	6-1	200	Sr.
	10	Jammal Lord*	6-2	215	So.
FB	4	Judd Davies*	6-0	240	So.
	45	Steve Kriewald	5-10	255	Fr.
IB	30	Dahrran Diedrick**	6-0	225	Jr.
	1	Thunder Collins*	6-2	190	Jr.
WB	8	John Gibson***	6-0	195	Sr.
	89	Troy Hassebrook**	6-4	220	Jr.
PK	26	Josh Brown**	6-2	190	Jr.

NEBRASKA DEFENSE

LR	57	Chris Kelsay**	6-5	270	Jr.
	92	Justin Smith**	6-4	260	Jr.
NT	55	Jon Clanton**	6-2	280	Jr.
	59	Ryon Bingham	6-3	275	So.
DT	56	Jeremy Siechta***	6-6	285	Sr.
	85	Casey Nelson**	6-2	285	Sr.
RR	98	Demoins Adams**	6-2	235	Jr.
	95	J.P. Wichmann**	6-4	230	Jr.
SLB	43	Scott Shanley**	6-2	235	Jr.
	47	Ira Cooper	6-2	220	Fr.
MLB	48	Jamie Burrow**	6-1	245	Sr.
	38	Barrett Ruud	6-2	220	Fr.
WLB	9	Mark Vedral**	6-1	210	Sr.
	17	T.J. Hollowell*	6-0	220	So.
LCB	3	Keyuo Craver***	5-10	190	Sr.
	28	Pat Ricketts*	5-11	180	So.
FS	27	Willie Amos*	6-0	185	So.
	31	Jerrell Pippens*	6-2	190	So.
ROV	14	Dion Booker***	6-1	205	Sr.
	21	Philip Bland	6-0	205	Fr.
RCB	5	DeJuan Groce**	5-10	190	Jr.
or	16	Erwin Swiney***	6-0	185	Sr.
P	19	Kyle Larson	6-0	205	So.

MIAMI OFFENSE

SE	5	Andre Johnson*	6-3	212	So.
	7	Ethenic Sands**	6-0	175	Jr.
LT	78	Bryant McKinnie*	6-9	336	Sr.
	76	Carlos Joseph	6-6	316	Fr.
LG	74	Sherko Haji-Rassouli**	6-6	315	Jr.
	72	Ed Wilkins**	6-4	308	Jr.
C	66	Brett Romberg**	6-3	289	Jr.
	70	Joel Rodriguez	6-3	275	Fr.
RG	65	Martin Bibla***	6-4	306	Sr.
	60	Vernon Carey*	6-5	346	So.
RT	73	Joaquin Gonzalez***	6-5	294	Sr.
	68	Joe Fantigrassi*	6-4	278	Jr.
TE	88	Jeremy Shockey*	6-6	246	Jr.
	80	Robert Williams**	6-4	241	Jr.
QB	11	Ken Dorsey**	6-5	200	Jr.
	18	Derrick Crudup	6-1	202	Fr.
TB	28	Clinton Portis**	5-11	201	Jr.
	2	Willis McGahee	6-1	220	Fr.
FB	4	Najeh Davenport**	6-2	242	Jr.
	34	Jarrett Payton*	6-2	210	So.
FL	1	Daryl Jones**	5-10	182	Sr.
	9	Kevin Beard*	6-2	179	So.
K	16	Todd Slevers*	6-3	214	Jr.

MIAMI DEFENSE

LE	98	Cornelius Green*	6-4	253	Sr.
	95	Jerome McDougle	6-4	260	Jr.
LT	94	William Joseph***	6-5	282	Jr.
	56	Santonio Thomas*	6-4	297	So.
RT	91	Matt Walters**	6-5	262	Jr.
	75	Vince Wilfork	6-2	346	Fr.
RE	55	Jamaal Green**	6-3	257	Jr.
	93	John Square	6-5	201	Fr.
SLB	48	Chris Campbell***	6-2	227	Sr.
	58	Jarrell Weaver*	6-3	209	So.
MLB	51	Jonathan Vilma*	6-2	220	So.
	45	Howard Clark**	6-1	228	Jr.
WLB	17	D.J. Williams*	6-2	243	So.
	49	Darrell McClover*	6-2	213	So.
LCB	31	Phillip Buchanan**	5-11	182	Jr.
	27	Markese Fitzgerald**	5-11	184	Sr.
SS	20	Edward Reed***	6-0	198	Sr.
	29	James Scott**	6-2	193	Jr.
FS	23	James Lewis***	5-11	190	Sr.
	36	Maurice Sikes*	5-11	193	So.
RCB	8	Mike Rumph***	6-2	190	Fr.
	25	Al Marshall	6-1	180	Fr.
P	13	Freddie Capshaw**	5-11	186	Jr.

THE PAUL FELL PREDICTION

NEBRASKA vs. MIAMI

JAN. 3, 2002

HUSKERS NEED TO PUT A HEAVYWEIGHT WHIPPIN' ON THE 'CANES TO SHUT THEM DOWN AND SILENCE THE NATION'S NAYSAYERS!

PICKS

NEBRASKA VS MIAMI

Brian Hill Editor

Nebraska has all the motivation in the world, including the chance to atone for the performance in Boulder and showing the doubters that it belongs. Miami is unbeaten but certainly not unbeatable. **Nebraska 31, Miami 29**

Mike Babcock Contributing Editor

Despite the negative energy of its detractors, Nebraska will be well-prepared to play Miami. What the Hurricanes see on the Colorado videotape of the Cornhusker defense will be misleading. Even so, this national title game isn't likely to be dominated by defense the way last year's Orange Bowl game was. Both offenses are potent enough to offset good defensive efforts. **Nebraska 27, Miami 24**

Terry Douglass Grand Island Independent Sports Editor

Logic says that Miami will win. The Hurricanes have dozens of future NFL prospects on their roster and all the confidence in the world after completing an 11-0 regular season. However, the controversy surrounding this game and whether or not Nebraska, a 10-point underdog, deserves to be there might just be the smokescreen the highly motivated Huskers need to pull off a shocker. **Nebraska 24, Miami 17**

Gary Ferman CaneSport Editor

The diversity of the Miami offense will make the difference. The Hurricanes have the ability to keep Nebraska off balance throughout the game. **Miami 31, Nebraska 21**

Not Quite

Huskers lose lead, chance for repeat national title

By Todd Henrichs

One point. One run-of-the-mill kill, a simple block or ace coming at precisely the right moment, and Nebraska may have carried another NCAA volleyball national championship back to Lincoln.

Instead, the Huskers went home early from San Diego. Their timing, at least in this year's final four, was all bad.

Nebraska, the defending national champion, couldn't protect a hard-earned lead against Stanford in the national semifinals played at Cox Arena. The Huskers failed to convert on four game points in the opener as the Cardinal scored six in a row to win.

In game two, Stanford broke Big Red hearts with another rally, this time scoring seven of the last eight points. The Cardinal won 31-29, 30-28, 30-21 and went on to upset top-ranked Long Beach State to claim the national championship.

So began a winter wonderland for Coach John Cook and the Huskers, months of wondering what might have been.

"We missed two great opportunities to win those first two games," Cook said. "That's what was so disappointing about our performance.

"I felt like we were as good or better than them. But in rally score, when you get down to the end there, it's about who is going to make plays. Stanford made some great plays."



The Huskers celebrate after defeating Florida in five games in the regional final at the NU Coliseum.

The loss capped a tumultuous postseason, one that began with the second-seeded Huskers surprisingly

being sent on the road for two matches due to NCAA guidelines designed to limit air travel this year.



Nancy Metcalf (left) and Jenny Kropp were Nebraska's only seniors. Metcalf was a first-team All-American for the third time, and Kropp was a second-team pick.

Nebraska survived a difficult second-round test at rival Kansas State, only to return home to face two more risky matches. The Huskers were hard pressed to get by Colorado State in the regional semifinals, then needed a game-five comeback to slip past Florida.

Heading for San Diego, Cook said Nebraska had to be the team best prepared for winning a championship. Stanford, however, countered with the best player. The Cardinal's Logan Tom was a 2000 Olympian who proved unstoppable with the match on the line.

Tom hit Nebraska for 22 kills, an ace and five blocks. She personally accounted for eight straight points in Stanford's come-from-behind victory in game two.

"She just makes plays that nobody else can make," Cook said. "She bails their team out. We've got players that can do that, but to me she is at a different level above that.

"We prepared well for her, but there are some things that she did that you can't prepare for."

Nebraska began the season as the consensus No. 1 team. They marched through the regular season, winning

the State Farm Women's Volleyball Classic and running the table in the still unproven Big 12 Conference.

Prior to Stanford, Nebraska's only loss was an early September visit to Long Beach State. But even that night, Nebraska questioned whether it could have or should have beaten the fired-up 49ers. Setter Greichaly Cepero played at less than full strength after spending most of the morning in a hospital emergency room.

Cook predicted that the defeat would make Nebraska better. But at the final four, he confessed the Huskers didn't improve much over the course of the season.

Nebraska had four All-Americans, more than any other team in the country. Senior Nancy Metcalf made first team for the third time in her career, joining Allison Weston as the only Huskers to do that.

The Huskers also lose senior Jenny Kropp, a second-team pick.

Nebraska, however, will return a core group that Cook says can win a national title next year in New Orleans. Juniors Amber Holmquist and Cepero were both All-Americans this season. Laura Pilakowski, another

junior, was an All-American last year.

Defensive specialist Lindsay Wischmeier is molded perfectly to take on the role as locker-room leader.

"I started thinking about next year already when we went through the line and we were shaking hands with Stanford," Wischmeier said. "The feeling we had after that game, I don't want to experience that again."

That's good, Cook said, because Nebraska was maybe lacking an edge after winning everything a year ago. The team's chemistry or sense of invincibility was never the same as that special season when Nebraska went from contender to confident champion.

Still, the Huskers' two-year record is a startling 65-2. The Huskers had more academic All-Americans than any team in the country.

And even though sleeping wasn't easy in the nights after Nebraska's season ended, that's something Cook can feel good about.

"Over the last two years, this team did everything it possibly could on and off the court except win a second national championship." ■

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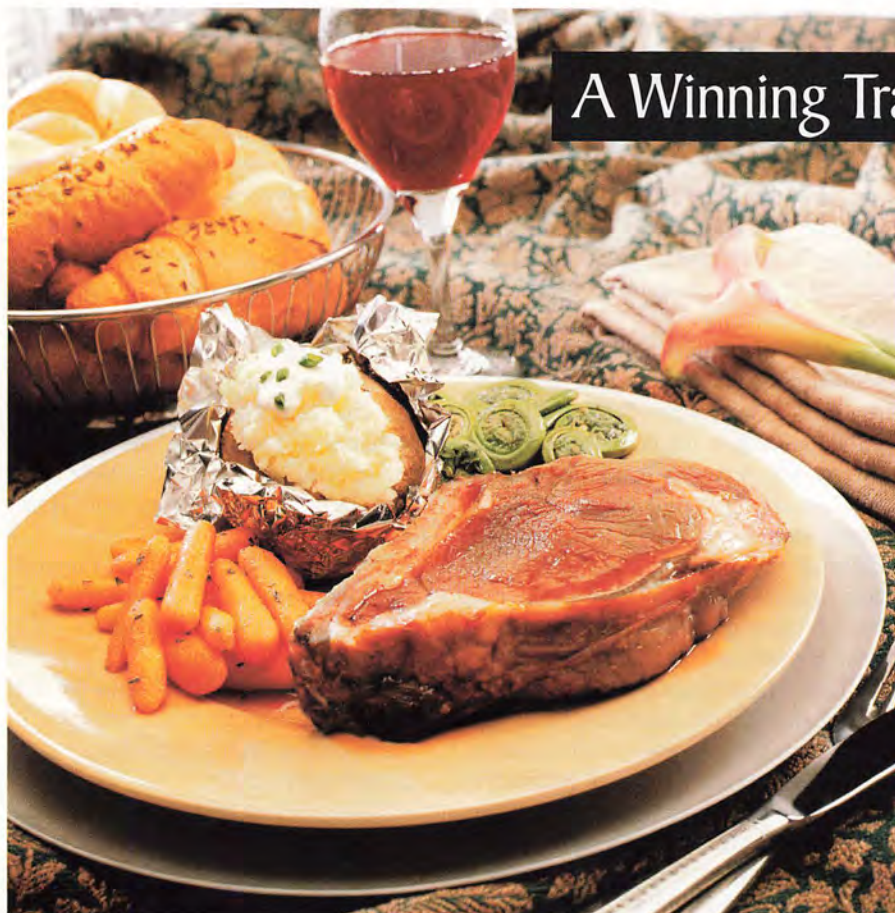
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Something

NU defense looking to redeem itself after allowing 62 points in Boulder

By Mike Babcock

Scott Shanle has had a smile on his face since the announcement that Nebraska would be playing Miami in the Rose Bowl game — a “permanent smile” is how he describes it.

Since the announcement, the Cornhuskers’ junior strongside linebacker has also resumed watching ESPN’s SportsCenter, after avoiding the program following the Colorado game. He didn’t care to watch constant replays of Buffaloes running back Chris Brown scoring six touchdowns.

“They’re still not saying too good of things about us,” Shanle said. “When they say Nebraska’s in the Rose Bowl what comes up after that is, Colorado hung 62 on us.”

But he can tolerate the negativity now, and even use it to advantage.

“We’re going to keep that in the back of our minds,” he said. “We want to end this year with a defense that everybody saw against Oklahoma, with that type of effort.”

The Blackshirts matched Oklahoma’s highly regarded defense tackle for tackle that day, limiting the Sooner offense to 339 yards and just 10 points — all in the second quarter.



That was a far cry from what happened a month later in Boulder, Colo. The defense yielded 28 points and 233 yards during the first quarter alone, on the way to the 62-36 drubbing.

The 62 points were the most ever allowed by a Nebraska team, a dubious distinction that those involved will never be able to forget, according to junior rush end Chris Kelsay.

“Once you think it’s out of your mind, something pops up and you start thinking about it again,” he said.

Senior cornerback Keyuo Craver doesn’t give it much thought, but only because “I don’t really have to think a lot about it because enough people are thinking about it for me,” he said.

The question is always the same:

g to Prove



Nebraska safety Willie Amos (27), middle linebacker Jamie Burrow (48) and rush end Chris Kelsay (57) surround a Colorado ballcarrier during the Nov. 23 game in Boulder. The Nebraska defense spent much of the game chasing Colorado running backs. The Buffaloes finished with 582 total yards, including 380 rushing — four times what the Blackshirts had allowed on the average.

rushing defense (116.9).

Colorado finished with 582 total yards, including 380 rushing — four times what the Blackshirts had allowed on the average. "They ran the ball on us all day," Craver said.

Nebraska's defense is based on stopping the run first, an approach that will be tested by a balanced Miami offense, which includes Clinton Portis, who has rushed for 1,200 yards.

Colorado's 62 points were a reflection of its dramatic success running the ball. "They prepared well for us. They had a great strategy, a great game plan," said Kelsay.

"They did some things we weren't prepared for. Once we kind of adjusted, they were able to counter it. So you've got to give them credit. I give them a lot of credit for the win. They deserved it. But on the same note, I think it would be a different ballgame if we were to play again."

The defense regrouped in the second half at Colorado, forcing the Buffaloes to go three-downs-and-punt on their first three possessions of a scoreless third quarter for them.

After Nebraska scored a touchdown to cut the deficit to 42-30 with 4:17 remaining in the third quarter, "I was thinking, 'We're going to get it,'" said Shanle. But Colorado "made a few plays, and it got to the point where we just didn't have enough time to come back."

The fourth quarter belonged to the Buffaloes, though not necessarily because Nebraska's defense was beginning to wear down, according

"What happened?"

And so is his answer: "I don't know."

Even with the passing of time, there are no satisfactory explanations for what happened to Nebraska's defense on the day after Thanksgiving. "We know we didn't come to play," said Craver.

That was reflected in numbers so outlandish as to have a noticeable

effect on the Cornhuskers' national rankings in three major defensive statistical categories, even though it was only one game in 12. They went into the Colorado game ranked second in scoring defense (11.55), sixth in total defense (260.36) and 13th in rushing defense (93). They will go into the Rose Bowl game ranked sixth in scoring defense (15.8), eighth in total defense (287.17) and 22nd in



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to Kelsay. After playing well through most of the third quarter, "we kind of folded a little bit, and they took advantage of some things," he said.

"I think it would have been a different ballgame if we wouldn't have made so many mental errors and had the type of penalties that we had and had given them the field position we gave them."

The first of Colorado's three fourth-quarter touchdowns came on a drive helped by two penalties, including one for pass interference, while the other two were set up by interceptions that gave the Buffaloes' excellent field position, at the Nebraska 8- and 17-yard lines.

The Cornhuskers never gave up, even as the deficit became insurmountable. And Colorado Coach Gary Barnett kept his starters on the field after the game had been decided.

"I don't think guys wore down," Shanle said. "We were trying to get back in the game."

Memories of Boulder motivate Nebraska's defense as it prepares for Miami.

"We've got a point to prove," said junior cornerback DeJuan Groce.

Despite the embarrassment of giving up 62 points, the defense maintained the cohesiveness that had come to characterize it during the season's first 11 games. Even as the situation deteriorated, the Blackshirts managed to stick together. And "that's what you need," Kelsay said.

"Any time you've got people surrounding you like the coaches and players we have, it's a lot easier to cope with situations like this. I think that's what everybody has realized. We're trying to stay together as a team. There is a lot of friendship on this team and a lot of cohesiveness. It's really paid off."

Shanle concurred. "After the game, you didn't hear people pointing fingers and saying, 'Well, if this guy would have done this, if this guy would have done that.' We didn't have any of that. Everybody stood by each other and knew that wasn't this defense that played in that game."

Shanle was smiling as he talked. The smile has been permanent since the Rose Bowl announcement. ■

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Pride, Unity

Huskers buy into Collier's philosophy

You might say that Barry Collier has tried to turn back the clock on the Nebraska basketball program, to a time when players were motivated by an old-fashioned concept — school spirit.

After victories, for example, the Cornhuskers have sung the school song in the locker room.

"I don't think guys, including me, last year and the year before, even knew the words to the fight song," said sophomore Brian Conklin. "There's a deeper sense of pride this year."

And that pride has manifested itself in a unity that might have been lacking in recent seasons.

"I'm not disrespecting anybody that's played here. I'm not singling out anybody," senior Cary Cochran said, "but often times, you could see people playing for something other than Nebraska." Now, "everybody's playing for what's on the (jersey) front as opposed to what's on the back."

Such an attitude fosters unselfishness and elevates the confidence level, said Cochran. "I just think we all believe in each other right now, including the coaches, including the trainers, everything. I think we believe in what we're doing and (that) we're definitely going in the right direction."

Nebraska struggled to find an identity last season, Collier's first as head coach, finishing with a 14-16 record, including 7-9 in the Big 12. Not surprisingly, some of the Cornhusker veterans had difficulty understanding Collier's system and adapting to the way he expected things to be done.

As is usually the case, the adjust-



Scott Bruhn

Sophomore forward Brian Conklin is one of three Huskers with a scoring average in double figures.

ment created tension, which has dissipated with the team's reshaping. Conklin, Cochran and senior John Robinson are the only returning players with significant experience a year ago. Senior Ross Buckendahl sat out last season following a knee injury.

Collier has opened up the program from a year ago and seems more comfortable with his team. "We have not had to spend nearly as much time on unity and the way to do things," he said.

"I'm guilty, in some ways, of drawing comparisons to last year's team, and that's not even relevant, much less even fair, because this year the guys that are back have had two years of what we're doing, and it's a different team, anyway. But this team has been able to spend time on basketball."

And that practice time has been productive. The players "understand why we're doing what we're doing on defense and do a good job of executing those defenses," he said.

Defense is a cornerstone of Collier's philosophy, as is the unity, putting the team first.

The players have bought into that, creating T-shirts with "discipline" and "toughness" printed on them. "It's kind of what we're molding our team after," said Cochran. "I just think that's what it boils down to. We're going to play harder than the other team. That's something Coach brought with him."

"In the past, I haven't seen us play 100 percent all game. I've seen a lot of times when we coasted. We're going to make the hustle plays (now). If we take a play off, with our lack of experience, our lack of McDonald's All-Americans or what have you . . . we can't do that. We've got to come basically every play and do the little things to win."

The Cornhuskers were doing those little things early in the season, and winning against low-profile non-conference opponents at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. In addition to a pair of pre-season exhibitions, their first six games and seven of their first eight were at home.

They won their first five games, Nebraska's best start since 1997-98.

Given their inexperience, the opportunity to be successful was more important than scheduling nationally prominent opponents on the road, Collier said following a 65-46 victory against Wofford, the second-smallest basketball school by enrollment in Division I of the NCAA.

"We think these teams are tough match-ups for us," he said. "At this point, we're very happy to be where we are. But we're not a dominating team; maybe we can just use a mirror here and some smoke there and get the job done."

Nebraska didn't need smoke and mirrors to get the job done against Wofford, or any of the other early

opponents. The key in those games was building the confidence of winning.

In order to be successful, "we don't have to have the non-conference schedule Arizona does, or someone of that nature, where they go in and play a top-five team every week," said Cochran.

"In order to build our program, in order to build our team, we have to get wins. You don't gain a whole lot of confidence playing really, really good teams and getting beat. So we're playing who is ever next on our schedule. We're going to take it game by game, the old saying, take one at a time. We're just going to build off each game and each practice we have."

Collier has emphasized the need to focus on the task at hand and not look ahead since he arrived at Nebraska. When asked if the 5-0 start had surprised him, he said it hadn't, only because he never looks beyond the next game and never projects wins and losses at the beginning of a season.

The team has met his expectations, however, because those expectations were, and are, that it would play hard and that the players would "complement each other and be willing to accept roles," he said. "Those roles are defined by the players' strengths and weaknesses."

His expectations included the players' having "the discipline and humility" to accept such an approach. "Those are expectations," he said. "And this team has met them."

The players weren't surprised by the early success, according to freshman Jake Muhleisen, who has been a starter since the 69-57 opening-game victory against North Carolina A&T.

Like everyone else, he has bought into Collier's philosophy. "We don't ever look past anybody," he said.

He was expressing a coaching cliché, an approach as old-fashioned as the singing of the school song, There Is No Place Like Nebraska, after victories. "I'll tell you, we have the greatest fight song there is," said Collier. "So I don't think we can say that enough or think about it enough."

"We're trying to . . . celebrate the games as a team-win for Nebraska and that lends itself. I stick by that. We have a great fight song. And there is no place like Nebraska."

The enthusiasm transcends the quality of the players' singing, however.

"It's not the Vienna Boys Choir," Collier said. ■

RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

MORE THE MERRIER

Coach Paul Sanderford's Husker women's team also got off to a fast start. "They're not looking at who they play or the name of the school," Sanderford said after an 89-63 victory against Weber State in early December. "They're just playing. They're having fun playing."

Six Huskers scored in double figures against Weber State, led by junior guard Margaret Richards, who came off the bench to score 15 points in just 14 minutes of action.

Eight other Huskers also played 14 or more minutes.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Newcomers Katie Robinette, a freshman, and Keasha Cannon, a junior college transfer, have adjusted well. Both have been in the starting lineup since the beginning of the season.

Robinette was chosen to the all-tournament team at the San Juan Shootout. She averaged 10.3 points in the three games, leading the Huskers to a second-place finish behind Tulane. She scored 23 points and pulled down 15 rebounds in a 59-56 victory against Creighton in mid-November.



Katie Robinette



Keasha Cannon

Cannon was chosen as the Big 12 rookie of the week after scoring 37 points and grabbing 21 rebounds in victories against Texas Southern (87-51) and at New Orleans (87-58).

Cannon is "all over the place, defensively, offensively," junior teammate Shahidrah Roberts told the Lincoln Journal Star. "She's a complete player. She's every coach's dream, I guess."

THREE AT A TIME

Sophomore K.C. Cowgill tied a school single-game record by hitting 7-of-8 shots from 3-point range in an 80-74 victory against Northern Iowa in late November. Cowgill finished with 23 points.

Amy Stephen made 7-of-8 3-point shots against Kansas State on Feb. 4, 1989. Stephens also hit seven 3-pointers (in 10 attempts) against Iowa on Dec. 30, 1988. Cowgill hit 50 percent of her 3-point shots in the first eight games.

YOUTH MOVEMENT

Sanderford has been using the same starting lineup: Cannon, Robinette, Cowgill, Shannon Howell and Katie Morse. Howell and Morse, like Cowgill, are sophomores. Amanda Cleveland is the team's only senior, and she could conceivably be granted another season of eligibility by the NCAA.

BLUE-COLLAR WORKER

Ross Buckendahl, one of five seniors on Coach Barry Collier's men's team, has earned the respect of his teammates — he's a co-captain — and a starting job through hard work.

His role "is to set screens, play defense," he said. "I usually get matched up against their (opponents') better inside player. I take pride in that. I like banging inside."

The former walk-on from Battle Creek, Neb., also takes pride in assisting his teammates. "I don't show it, but I like to get people open for shots," he said. "I kind of enjoy that."

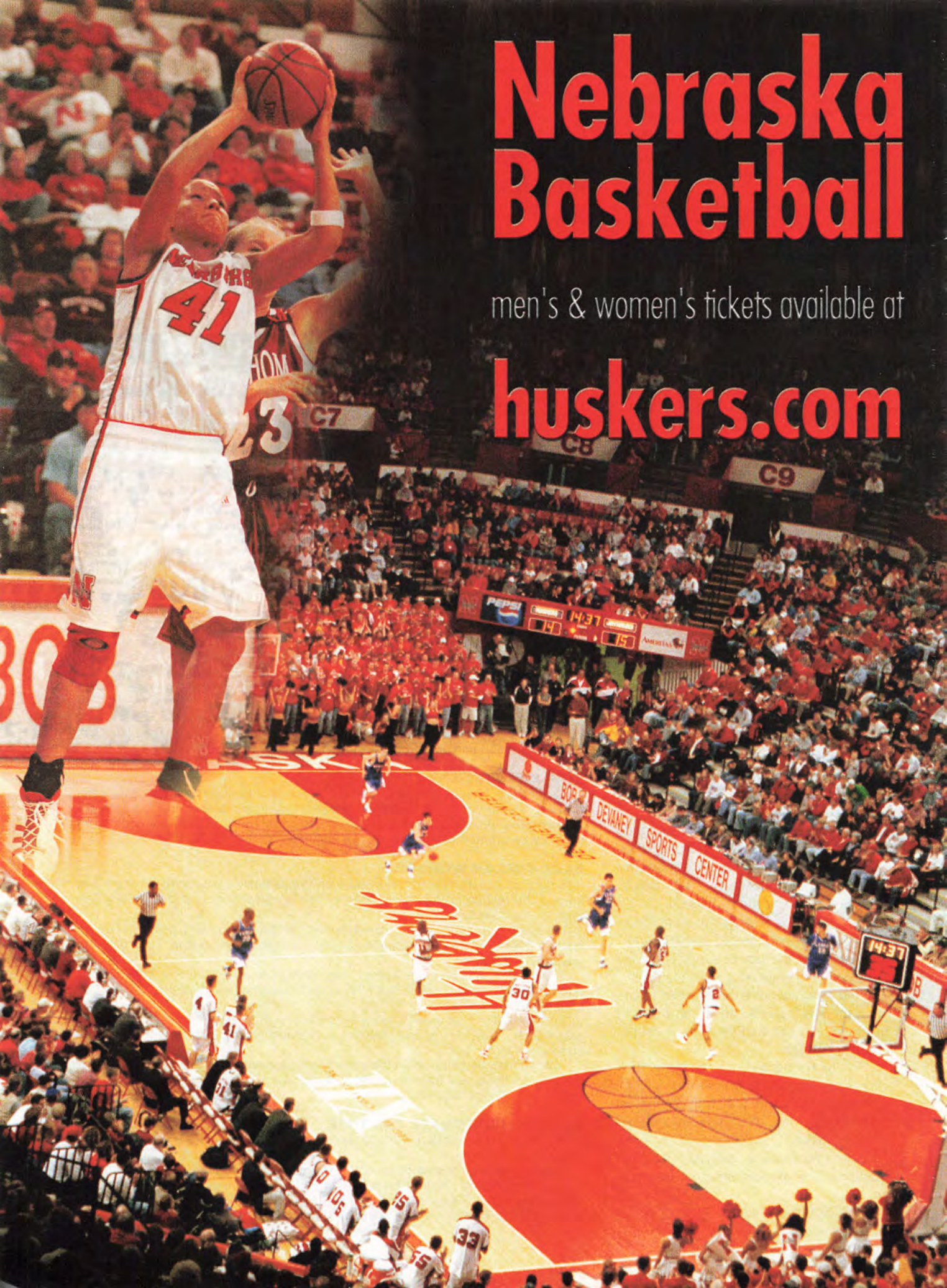
Buckendahl's effort as well as his intensity and toughness "are really evident," said Collier. "He's strong and physical, a very willing screener and active defensive player in the post."

"We've matched him up on the other guy's best post man whenever we can. If there's one thing you love about Ross Buckendahl, it's his heart. That makes all those other things happen."

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

Freshman John Turek has made the most of his opportunities coming off the bench.

"Every game he seems to be getting more and more confident," said teammate Brian Conklin. "From where he started to where he is now is just amazing. He's going to kill the boards for us, play really hard. The confidence is going to keep building. He's just going to get better and better." ■



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Mature Freshman

Former teacher a good student of wrestling

By Steven M. Sipple

He's one of four red-shirt freshmen spending significant time in the Nebraska wrestling team's starting lineup this season. But Justin Ruiz isn't your typical redshirt freshman.

For one thing, he's 22 years old. What's more, he spent the last two years on a mission in Chile teaching for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As a result, Nebraska Coach Mark Manning says, Ruiz is "really mature." In addition, having been a teacher himself, Ruiz understands the importance of listening intently to instruction.

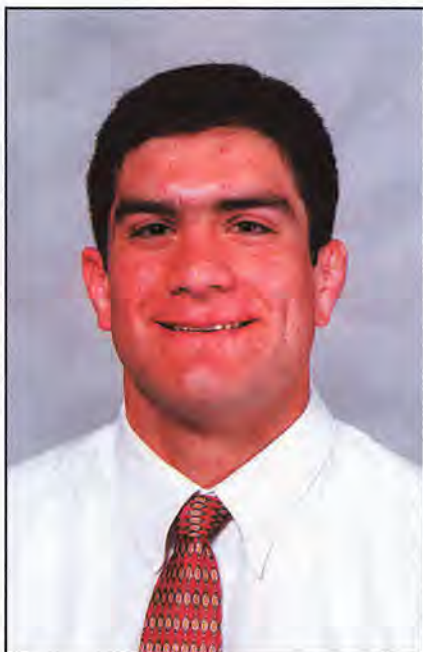
"When he hears coaches say things in the wrestling room, he seems to have a great understanding," Manning says.

Ruiz, the starter at 197 pounds, apparently is adept at transferring his knowledge to the mat. Through six meets this season — including four Nebraska dual victories against no defeats — Ruiz stood 13-2, with two technical falls and four major decisions.

As of Dec. 12, he was among three Huskers ranked in the top five of their weight classes, joining 125-pound sophomore Jason Powell and 157-pound senior Bryan Snyder.

Says Ruiz, "I just want to wrestle hard, wrestle smart and wrestle my style."

He left for Chile in September 1999 and returned to the United States in August 2001. He says the experience could help him as a



Justin Ruiz, Nebraska's starter at 197 pounds, is far from a typical redshirt freshman.

wrestler.

"I think it helped me mature mentally, as far as goal-setting and figuring out where I want to go in life," he says.

As for where he wants to go with his wrestling this season, Ruiz says, "It's really not a competition against other people. It's mostly about performing the best I can."

Before leaving for his mission, Ruiz competed for Nebraska in 1999, building a 12-3 record competing as a redshirt in open tournaments.

Recruited by former Nebraska coach Tim Neumann, Ruiz arrived in Lincoln as one of the nation's top high school prospects after capturing three Utah state championships at Taylorsville High School. The National Wrestling Hall of Fame's high school wrestler of the year, Ruiz is a former Junior National Greco-Roman champion.

While in Chile, Ruiz learned of the turmoil in Nebraska's program from news clippings and letters sent by his family. Neumann was forced to

resign in April 2000 after allegedly breaking NCAA extra-benefits rules. Sanctions are expected to be levied during the next month or so.

Ruiz monitored the situation from afar and was concerned. But he says he had no reservations about returning to Lincoln.

"I knew it would still be a good environment for me," he says.

Ruiz fills the lineup spot occupied the last two seasons by Brad Vering, a three-time All-American who in 2000 captured the NCAA championship.

"I haven't even thought about that," Ruiz says when asked how it feels to replace a state wrestling legend. "I figure if I do the best I can, everything will work out fine."

Things went smoothly for Nebraska during the early stages of the season. Led by Snyder, who was undefeated through 14 matches, the Huskers recorded dual victories against Augustana (S.D.), Rider (N.J.), Air Force and Wyoming. Mixed in was a seventh-place finish in the 53-team Las Vegas Invitational and a strong showing in the Nebraska-Omaha Open, which didn't have team scoring.

"Our team is wrestling hard for each other, and that's a great asset to have," says Manning, in his second season at Nebraska after three as head coach at Northern Iowa.

Snyder and 165-pound Tony Denke are the team's only seniors.

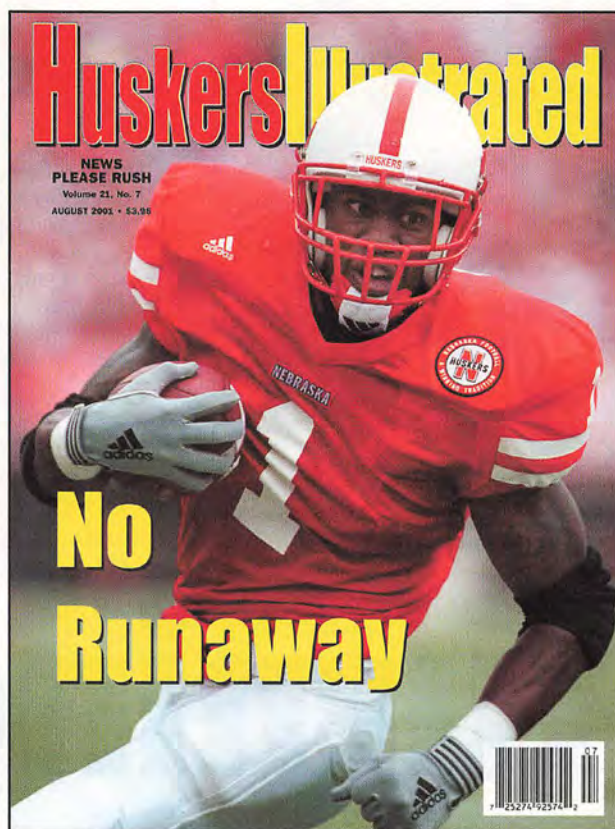
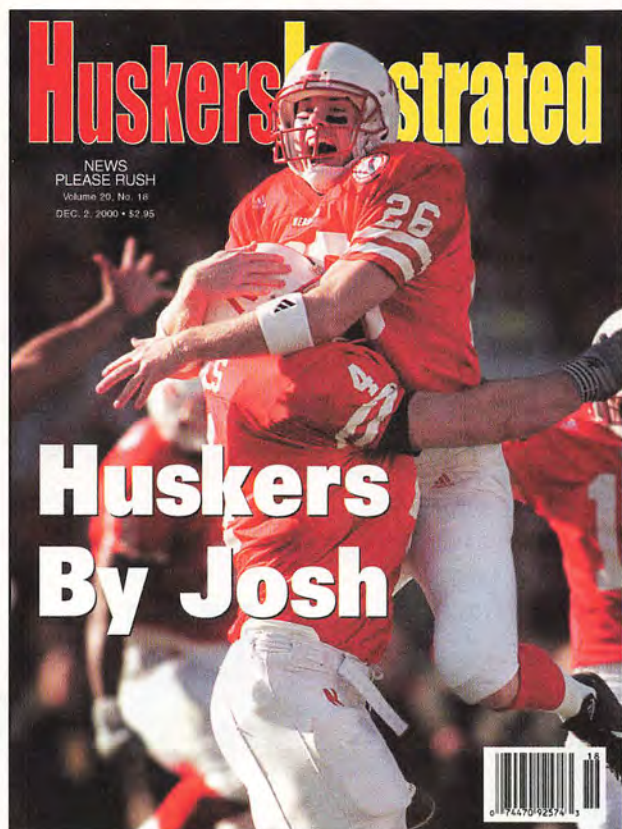
"It's a young team, but we have a lot of potential," Manning said.

Not to mention a lot of wrestlers. Nebraska has 37 team members this season, 13 more than last season.

"You need depth," Manning said. "I think you need three guys per weight class. Look at Iowa State last season. They had to get a guy off the intramural team to wrestle at 125."

The Huskers are operating at full-capacity, numbers-wise. "Our wrestling room can't hold any more," Manning said. ■

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. . . Best Wishes in 2002



Highly regarded defensive lineman Haloti Ngata gave Nebraska coaches his commitment in early December.

Commitments for 2002

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Adam Carriker	Kennewick, Wash.	6-6	235	DE
Curt Dukes	Newton (Newton-Conover), N.C.	6-2	210	QB
Matt Herian	Pierce, Neb.	6-5	225	TE
Mark LeFlore	Omaha (Central), Neb.	6-0	185	WR
Kurt Mann	Grand Island, Neb.	6-4 1/2	255	OL
Ronald McClendon	Ponchatoula, La. (Butler Co. CC)	5-9	185	WB
Jay Moore	Elkhorn, Neb.	6-4 1/2	245	RE
Haloti Ngata	Salt Lake City (Highlands), Utah	6-5	310	DT
Dane Todd	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	5-11 1/2	230	FB
Fabian Washington	Bradenton (Bayshore), Fla.	6-0	175	CB
DeMorrio Williams	Beckville, Texas (Kilgore College)	6-1	200	LB

Commitments for 2003

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Josh Mueller	Columbus (Lakeview), Neb.	6-7	245	TE
Bo Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	207	LB

Turning It Up

Nebraska gets December visits from many of the nation's top players

By Doug Horwich

The end of the regular season marked the beginning of a heightened focus on recruiting for the Nebraska staff.

Perhaps the only positive outcome of a disheartening loss to Colorado was that it allowed the Husker coaches to turn their attention to recruiting a full week earlier than they had anticipated.

December is also the time of year when a much more substantial number of official visits take place. Although a handful of recruits did visit during the regular season, these visits consisted of only a few

prospects each weekend, as the coaches are too busy to spend as much time with visiting recruits as they would prefer.

Recruiting weekends in December and January generally consist of no fewer than five visitors on a given weekend, and occasionally as many as 10 or more. Because most of the official visits at Nebraska take place during these two months, the majority of post-summer commitments generally occur during this time.

Traditionally, Nebraska has received the majority of its commitments prior to January, which allows

the coaches to focus their attention on a select few prospects in the weeks leading up to Signing Day.

One of the top few defensive prospects in the nation this year is middle linebacker Mike D'Andrea (6-3, 235, 4.55) from Avon Lake, Ohio. D'Andrea is a phenomenal athletic specimen with remarkable speed and agility for his size, and it would be hard to find a school in the country that has not offered him a scholarship. However, Nebraska was the first school to offer D'Andrea, and the Husker staff has been recruiting him heavily since last spring.

Despite the fact that D'Andrea has continually maintained that he does not have a leader among his final four choices of Ohio State, Michigan, Nebraska and Notre Dame, most recruiting analysts feel that he is likely to end up at Ohio State.

For a time in November, it appeared that only Ohio State and Michigan were ensured visits. However, D'Andrea later scheduled visits to all four of his favorites, with Nebraska getting his fourth and final

visit in mid-December.

D'Andrea expected to have a final decision made by Christmas, and although Ohio State appeared to be in the driver's seat for his commitment, the Huskers could pull off an upset if he enjoys his Nebraska visit the most.

D'Andrea did make unofficial visits to all of his favorites last summer but will use his official visits to get to know the players at each school. Often, recruits find during a visit that they fit in better at a school that was not previously their favorite.

Another player scheduled to visit in mid-December was defensive tackle Brandon Greeson (6-5, 310, 5.1) from Central High School in High Point, N.C.

"I have a visit scheduled to Virginia Tech, Michigan and Nebraska," Greeson said. "I made the North Carolina Shrine Bowl team, and if I play in that game, I may have to reschedule the Nebraska visit. However, if my team makes it to the championship game, I won't be able to play in the Shrine game and will take the Nebraska visit as scheduled.

"If my injury doesn't get better in time, and I'm unable to play in either, I'll make the Nebraska visit as planned. I don't plan to visit North Carolina officially."

Nebraska has remained Greeson's favorite for the past few months, and the Huskers have made a strong impression on him.

"Nebraska is my favorite," he said. "I feel most comfortable with the coaches and they seem to want me the most."

Also scheduled to visit in mid-December was running back/defensive back Tyrone Diggs (5-9, 180, 4.35) from Harrisburg, Pa. Diggs is an explosive and versatile athlete who has favored the Huskers for a while now.

Diggs rushed for more than 1,000 yards as a junior, but a hamstring injury kept him on the bench for all but four games during his senior season. Nevertheless, coaches from all over the country have been calling.

"I have quite a few offers," Diggs said. "North Carolina, Kansas State, Nebraska, Tennessee, Boston College, Michigan State, Syracuse, Virginia Tech, Georgia and Miami

Utah Lineman Picks Huskers

By Rick Shaw

The first few days of December proved to be monumental for the Nebraska Football program.

On Dec. 8, Nebraska senior quarterback Eric Crouch was named the recipient of the Heisman Trophy. On Dec. 9, the Cornhuskers were informed that they would play Miami for the national championship in the Rose Bowl.

As big as those announcements were for the Huskers, it was an announcement on Dec. 3 that may very well have an even greater impact on the future of Nebraska football. On that day, high school All-America defensive tackle prospect Haloti Ngata announced that he would attend the Nebraska.

Ngata, a 6-foot-5, 310-pound blue-chipper out of Highlands High School in Salt Lake City, Utah, became the eighth commitment of Nebraska's recruiting class of 2002. He chose the Huskers after carefully considering scholarship offers from Washington, UCLA, Texas A&M, Michigan, Oregon and a host of other schools.

"I am happy for him," said Haloti's father Solomone the day after his son made his commitment to Nebraska coaches. "He made a good decision, and from the beginning, he liked Nebraska."

Ngata provides Nebraska an athletic and powerful prospect to help fill the gaps in the defensive interior. Ngata benches 395 pounds and has recorded a 40-yard dash time of 4.78 seconds. As a senior in 2001, Ngata recorded more than 100 total tackles and 30 sacks from his defensive tackle post.

Ngata is regarded by most recruiting services to be one of the top high school prospects in the country. Rivals100 has Ngata rated as the No. 2 defensive tackle prospect and the No. 13 player overall. SuperPrep lists Ngata as one of the top 50 prospects in the country.

More importantly, Nebraska coaches had Ngata rated as their top prospect at any position. Ngata's commitment will go a long way toward helping Nebraska secure one of the nation's top recruiting classes in February.

As will the commitment of Ronald McClendon. The 5-foot-9, 185-pound all-purpose back from Butler County (Kan.) Community College gave his commitment to Nebraska coaches during his visit to Lincoln on Dec. 9.

"I'm going there next semester," McClendon said. "I loved it. I spent my time with Dahrran (Deidrick) and Thunder (Collins), and they told me everything. The town is the perfect size."

McClendon, who is rated by Rivals as the No. 1 junior college player in the country, was recruited to play wingback at Nebraska. He is also expected to utilize his 4.27 speed in the 40-yard dash to return punts and kicks in Lincoln.

McClendon also considered offers from Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, among others. However, he was unable to turn down those opportunities to be part of the Nebraska tradition in Lincoln.

"It was great," McClendon said about his official recruiting visit to Lincoln. "Crouch won the Heisman, and they are going to the Rose Bowl. We went to Walgreen's last night and bought roses." ■



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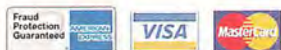
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have all offered me scholarships. Nebraska is recruiting me the hardest, though."

Diggs excelled on both sides of the football at the high school level, and although he prefers offense, his future in college could very well be on defense. With size and speed comparable to Husker senior Keyuo Craver, Diggs has the skills to be an outstanding cornerback prospect.

"The schools that are recruiting me like my speed," Diggs said. "I run a 4.3-second 40, and I've run a 10.5-second 100 meters."

Diggs said he won the state title in the 100 meters as a sophomore with a time of 10.7 seconds.

"When I come back from Nebraska, I will probably go down to Miami and see how it is down there," Diggs said. "If I really like my trip to Nebraska, though, I may just go ahead and commit and get it over with."

Diggs is looking for early playing time but is not opposed to redshirting if he feels it would be in his best interest.

"It would be nice to play as a freshman," Diggs said, "and hopefully, I won't get redshirted. If that is what happens, however, I will deal with it and work that much harder."

In what has been an on-again, off-again pattern of interest from top-rated offensive guard Justin Blalock (6-4, 325, 5.0) of Plano East High School in Plano, Texas, Nebraska has finally secured his fifth and final visit during the weekend of Jan. 25. The question remains, however, whether or not Blalock will hold out that long before making a decision.

Husker Assistant Turner Gill has been recruiting Blalock, who is considered by many to be the top-rated offensive guard prospect in the country this year.

Texas appears to be leading for his services, but Michigan, Oklahoma, Florida and Nebraska are also due to receive visits. If the Husker staff can convince Blalock to hold off on his decision until after he makes an official visit to Lincoln, then Nebraska has a remote chance at obtaining a commitment from him. However, this will be a difficult task, as Blalock has already indicated that a decision could be forthcoming prior to completing his visit schedule. ■

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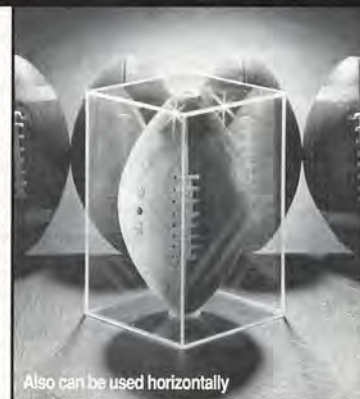
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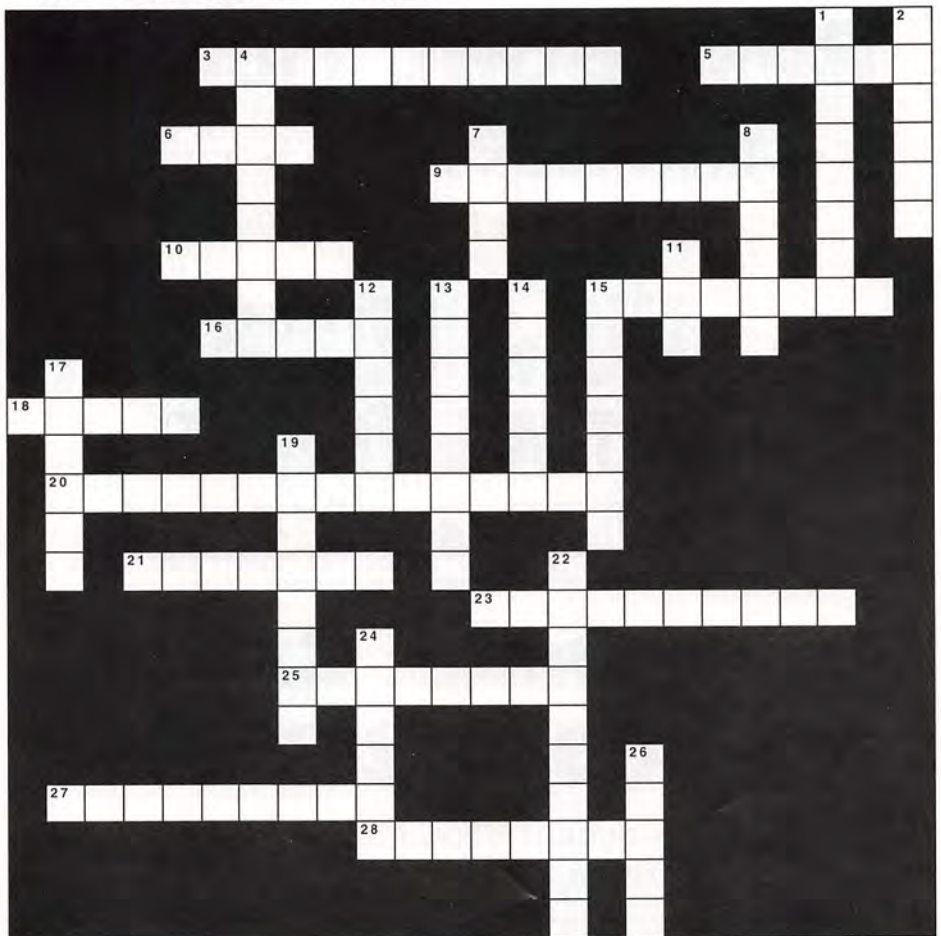
ACROSS

- 3 Scored clinching TD vs. Miami in Jan. 1, 1995 Orange Bowl
- 5 Heisman Trophy winner
- 6 Nebraska QB in 1984 meeting
- 9 NU's running backs coach
- 10 Played NU in 1962 Gotham Bowl
- 15 Played Stanford in 1941 Rose Bowl
- 16 Miami QB in 1984 meeting
- 18 Miami head coach
- 20 Miami head coach in Jan. 2, 1984 meeting
- 21 NU's academic All-American
- 23 Miami nickname
- 25 Heisman Trophy runnerup
- 27 NU's 2002 opener
- 28 National championship game site

DOWN

- 1 Frank Solich's college position
- 2 NU's No. 9 (offense)
- 4 No. 3 in BCS standings
- 7 Miami QB in 1962 Gotham Bowl
- 8 NU's No. 9 (defense)
- 11 Rose Bowl network
- 12 No. 4 in BCS standings
- 13 National championship game city
- 14 NU's defensive line coach
- 15 Gotham Bowl setting
- 17 Miami starting QB
- 19 NU QB in 1962 Gotham Bowl
- 22 Miami's home stadium
- 24 NU's second Heisman winner
- 26 NU's strength coach

Answers in February issue



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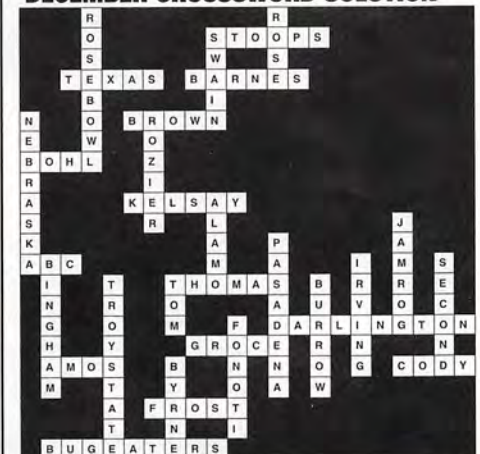
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